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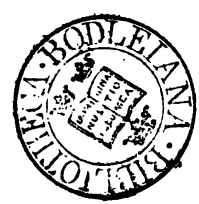
# CHRISTIAN OSBORNE'S FRIENDS.

BY

MRS. HARRIET MILLER DAVIDSON,

AUTHOR OF 'ISOBEL JARDINE'S HISTORY.'

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# CHRISTIAN OSBORNE'S FRIENDS.

## CHAPTER I.

### INVERURQUHART.

'HOW far do you call it to the other side, my man?'

'About ten miles, sir.'

'So much? Then, with this wind, we may be there in another hour.'

'Hardly, sir. We go straight enough to the Craigs, but after we are inside them we'll likely have to beat about for a while.'

The first speaker looked away out to sea again, not to the coast left behind an hour ago, nor to the bold precipitous line they were fast approaching, but in the direction of the unbroken expanse, where wave behind wave came sweeping on in majestic battalions, straight from the German Ocean.

'It is very grand,' he said.

'Ay, sir. We do see God's wonders in the deep, and hear his voice in the great waters.'

The gentleman looked at the sailor with an expression of slight surprise. In the first place he had spoken to himself, and had not expected any answer. In the second, he had a vague idea floating in his brain that people of the lower orders had no sense of beauty, and there was a certain amount of appreciativeness in the man's words. He observed more attentively than he had done hitherto, and noted a strong-featured face, burnt to a red-brown from exposure to the weather, a pair of keen, intelligent blue eyes, and a well-knit figure.

'It strikes me,' he said slowly, 'that I have seen you before somewhere.'

'I remember you well enough, Mr. Christian Osborne. I'm not likely to forget the one that saved my life when we were laddies. Do you recollect jumping over the pier-head after me, sir, the day we were fishing there, and I fell in?'

'Well, I rather think I do. So you are Robbie M'Intosh, are you? We have both changed a good deal since those days, Robbie. What a big strong fellow you have grown into!'

Robbie gave a short laugh. 'There's not much between us as to bigness, sir, I think. But I knew *you* the minute you set foot in the boat.'

There was a shade of implied reproach in the

words, but Mr. Osborne did not notice it. 'I dare say,' he said carelessly, 'I have seen too many faces since I left, to remember all I have known easily.'

Robbie looked a little hurt. He was steering the boat, and he called out some directions to the men who were attending to the sail. Mr. Osborne watched them haul down the great flapping brown canvas and lift it to the other side of the mast, and then he felt the boat swing round and fly off on a different tack, as the sail was once more adjusted, and swelled out in the wind. What a delicious bracing wind it was, bearing the salt sea smell from the miles of waves that it had blown over! Mr. Osborne had felt nothing like it for many a year, and he took off his cap to let it blow freely about his forehead, which it did without ceremony, tossing his hair about and clashing the salt spray in his face.

Robbie glanced shyly at the uncovered head just in front of him. He would have known the face anywhere; it had been too faithfully painted on his memory to let him forget it; yet the years that had passed over it had wrought a marked change. He missed the old kindly smile, and the frank open expression. The features were as handsome as ever; but to Robbie much of their charm was gone. He could not have put his want into words: men of his stamp continue in some things like children, they feel much that they have no power to express.

Perhaps one with a wider vocabulary would have said that Mr. Osborne looked somewhat *blasè*, and that the expression which spoiled his handsome face was one of thorough dissatisfaction with the world and with himself.

Yet he looked almost glad now, as another wave sent a shower-bath over him, leaving sparkling drops in his dark curls. His grey eyes lighted up with something very like pleasure as he turned again to Robbie.

'This is first rate! There is nothing like this to be had in London, Robbie.'

'They say London is a grand place, sir,' said Robbie timidly.

'It is a grand place,' answered the other. 'The grandest, most wretched, most wonderful place in the world. To you, I fancy, it would mean a combination of smoke and noise, black mud and wickedness. London is a grand place only to the rich. One finds there the extremes both of pleasure and misery; people enjoying and enduring, very close together, and profoundly ignorant of one another.'

Robbie was silent for a little; the boat was bounding over the waves, now gliding into a green transparent hollow, now rising over a white crest, with that free elastic motion which is more exhilarating than riding a fast horse, or travelling by express train, or than any other possible mode of locomotion.

'I don't know how I could live away from the sea,' he remarked. 'I was away from it for a week once, seeing some cousins of mine. They have a farm, a bonny enough place; but I was weary of the sight of green fields, and trees, and burns. Not but what a field of corn bending to the wind is bonny; but it reminded me of the waves, and I wearied to be back again.'

Mr. Osborne looked at him a little enviously. 'I wish I cared for anything half so much,' he said, half laughing.

Robbie shook his head. 'You have plenty of things. The sea is father, and mother, and home to me.'

'And wife? Are you not married yet, Robbie?'

But the sailor shook his head, and turned his face away; and Mr. Osborne saw that he had touched a sore point.

They were nearing the Craigs now; a break in the precipitous wall formed a passage of nearly a mile across, which led into a wide bay beyond. This passage was guarded on either side by tall promontories, green towards the top, but lower down consisting of rocks that had been roughened by the wave-beat of centuries. Here and there caves, where flocks of sea-birds roosted, seemed to lead away to deep shadowy passages; at other places jagged lines ran far out into the water, making navigation

difficult; or some tall pointed crag stood out alone in bold relief, like a stern sentinel, while the foam dashed angrily about its base. These two promontories were in fact a magnificent gateway, leading into a lovely blue bay, from which the wilder winds and rougher waves of the North Sea were shut out. It was a curious scene, weird and stern in its grandeur. Probably there is not another place in the world possessing just the same kind of beauty which characterizes the entrance to Inverurquhart Bay. As they glided through the passage, the little town of Inverurquhart came into sight, partly nestling beneath green sloping banks, partly built on a small tongue of land which ran out into the bay.

'How strange it seems to me to come back here!' said Mr. Osborne. 'I feel as if I had seen all those places in a dream, or in another state of existence. Am I the same *I* that I used to be when we scrambled about those rocks together, Robbie?'

He asked the question abruptly, with an odd curiosity as to whether his old companion would understand him. The answer surprised him for the second time that day.

'I'm not sure, sir; but I think that when we get to heaven we'll remember our life here just that way. And we'll be the same there.'

Wind and tide were contrary, and they had to run up far past the town. At the head of the bay lay

stretches of great mountains, solemnly beautiful with the sunlight and shadow drifting across them, and dim purple peaks rising behind into the sky. There is no wonder that David spoke of lifting his eyes unto the hills, from whence came his help. The strength of God seems always to rest on those still mountain tops, as his peace and love dwell in the green valleys below.

It was five o'clock on that July afternoon before Mr. Osborne stood on the pier, superintending the hoisting of his luggage out of the boat, by at least a dozen lounging men, and twice as many small boys, who had all been roused into temporary activity by his appearance. Work was scarce at Inverurquhart, and strangers at a premium, so that Mr. Osborne, his portmanteau, and prospective shillings, were looked upon as special providences. Being lazily inclined, he left Robbie to choose the best method of conveying his property to Inverurquhart House, and walked off, up the long pier, and into the curious, old-fashioned little town. The dream-feeling came upon him strongly as he went slowly up the roughly causeyed, narrow streets, between the irregular lines of houses, which had been set down anyhow, without regard to symmetry—some turned gablewise to the street, with paved courts in front, some close to the pavement, and others standing back twenty yards or so, with geraniums and stocks growing under their

windows. He took the right turnings instinctively, till, getting beyond the town, he reached a steep road, shaded by trees, which he remembered led to a side entrance to Inverurquhart House, and saved him from having to go nearly a couple of miles round to the principal avenue. Yes, there it was, just in the old place; nothing seemed to have been altered during those long ten years—years how long, yet how strangely short! The gate opened with the old trick; the evergreens bordering the path were the same; and there among the trees was the house, grey and square as ever, with its lawn in front, studded with beds of bright flowers, and vases filled with scarlet geraniums. Just before passing from the shelter of the evergreens he paused.

'They don't expect me,' he said to himself, half smiling. 'I wonder what they will say!'

## CHAPTER II.

### BROTHER AND SISTER.

BROAD rays of yellow sunlight were slanting through the trees, making the vivid green of the lawn look as if it were overlaid with a varnish of gold, and giving some warmth of colouring to the cold grey stone of the great house, when Mr. Osborne stepped out of the shrubbery, and came suddenly on rather a pretty scene. In front of the solemn old mansion, making a foreground to glowing beds of scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias, was a group of several figures, at which Mr. Osborne looked curiously. It is always a strange thing to take up our life, as it were, where it has been broken off years before. We come on the old stage to find the scenery the same, but the actors changed. New faces have entered, and the old have disappeared; and, most perplexing of all, sometimes the shadow of a well-known face looks out of one new and strange, and we find that it is the same,

and yet not the same, having grown completely out of our knowledge. We have to gather up the threads of acquaintanceship, not just where they were let fall, for that is impossible, but as nearly so as we can; and gradually we find out how many new threads have become entangled with them, and how many old ones are snapped for ever.

The group at which Mr. Osborne stood looking, before he went forward to break it up, was this: two servants had carried a table, covered with a white cloth, under a large lime-tree, in the branches of which numberless bees were humming. They were arranging on it silver, and china, and crystal, which shone and glittered in the sunlight. Hovering near them, with light, bird-like movements, and dainty hand-touches, was a small, slender, and pretty lady. She wore a light, gauzy dress, that floated about her as she moved; her hair was dark and rippled, and she had large dark-grey eyes, that were the precise *fac simile* of those with which Mr. Osborne was just then gazing at her. This was Mrs. Lynne, Christian Osborne's only sister.

I like to describe my heroines. I think it is satisfactory that you, my reader, if you at all care to read what I write, should be able to make a definite picture to yourself of Mercy Lester and Ailie Rose, as they stood in the sunlight on that July evening, and as Christian Osborne saw them for the first

time; for they were two of the new threads that joined his life; and each strand in that great web is somehow or other interwoven, and makes a bit, be it ever so small, of the pattern. Mercy Lester, then, was tall, and looked even taller than she was, because of her slender, pliant figure. She possessed a wealth of hair of the rare and beautiful amber colour, which we often see in pictures, and seldom anywhere else. Those glorious waves of hair swept back from a broad, white forehead, below which shone a pair of steady, dark-blue eyes. Her mouth was not very small, but exceedingly mobile. Its accustomed set was both firm and sweet, and the lips parted often in lovely, sunny smiles. One of her great beauties lay in the pose of her head. Her neck was very round and pillar-like; and the small head, with its crowning glory of hair, was carried with as much dignity as if it had belonged to an empress. Ailie Rose was as perfectly different as it was possible for one woman to be from another; and yet she too was beautiful. Her head hardly reached to Mercy Lester's shoulder, and her figure was almost too fragile in its slightness. Her face looked pale and sallow beside Mercy's clear red and white; but it was lighted up by her rare brown eyes — eyes which reminded one of deep, still waters, in their clear brownness, which were sometimes dreamy and shadowy, sometimes flashing with radiance. They

were her chief beauty, though her other features were small and delicately cut, and her lips were full and red. The difference between her beauty and Mercy Lester's was this: one saw at the first glance that Mercy was as stately as a duchess, and as beautiful as an unfallen Eve; but one needed to see Ailie Rose two or three times, to talk with her, and watch the varying expression of her face, before one found out how lovely she was.

Mercy was standing quite still when Mr. Osborne saw her first; she wore a black dress, made with exceeding plainness, that fell in severely simple folds to her feet. To her skirts were clinging two pretty dark-haired little girls, and she had an arm thrown round each. Mr. Osborne thought, 'She is like a picture of Charity that I've seen somewhere.' Ailie Rose was sitting on the grass near the lime-tree, looking up into its branches, and listening to the bees. Mrs. Lynne had just taken a great basket of strawberries from one of the servants, and was putting it down in the middle of the table, when her brother walked forward among all those people who were not expecting him, nor thinking about him in the least.

Mrs. Lynne turned round after setting down the basket of strawberries in the middle of the table, and saw him. She gave a little cry, half surprise, half gladness, and sprung towards him. And so Mercy and Ailie guessed that this stranger who had

suddenly stepped out of the shrubbery, and walked across the lawn, was Mrs. Lynne's brother. They both looked at him curiously, as he stood receiving his sister's greeting with something that would have been coolness, had there not been symptoms of real affection underlying the careless manner. Ailie rose from the grass to go away; Mercy had already turned towards the house, and the two linked their arms about each other's waists, and went up the broad steps into the hall.

'It is her brother Christian,' said Ailie softly. 'I knew him from the picture in her dressing-room. He is different, but I knew him.'

The two girls went slowly up the wide staircase; after leaving the bright, yellow sunshine outside, it seemed dark with its heavy, black oak banisters, and the light coming through the stained window half-way up, in soft blues and crimsons. Mercy's stately head made a bright spot in the shadow; Ailie hummed a tune under her breath as they went up; she had a trick of humming bits of tunes so, as she went about the house. She broke out into a snatch of an old song presently, and her voice filled the hall with its volume of sweet sound, floating up the staircase, and wakening echoes in the carved and groined roof.

'Oh, Randall was an altered man when he cam hame,
A sair, sair altered man was he, when he cam hame.'

'Mercy, come into Mrs. Lynne's dressing-room, I want to look at that picture.'

They went along a passage, and into a bright little room that was full of sunlight, for it looked away over the Inverurquhart woods, across the blue firth to where the sun was dipping towards the distant purple hills. The picture they had come to see hung just in the flood of yellow light, and Ailie had to shade her brown eyes with her hand while she looked at it. The face of a boy of eighteen, bright, and strong, and beautiful, with grey, well-opened eyes, that looked bravely out on the unknown life to come, and a sweet, half-smiling mouth, a face with something of the enthusiasm and poetry of early youth in it—this was what they looked at, not the face they had left down in the garden, below the lime-tree.

'How he has changed!' said Ailie.

'My dear, this was taken years ago. Remember he is a middle-aged man now, and has been out in the world since he looked like this.'

'The world,' said Ailie, in her dreamy way; 'I wonder what the world is like, Mercy! What *is* the world, and why should it change one so? For his face has changed, not only grown; he has lost something in the world, whatever it is.'

'I scarcely looked at him. What has he lost, Ailie?'

'I can hardly tell. This face looks bright and eager, the one down stairs looks as if it didn't care for anything.'

'I suppose people lose their freshness in the world, Ailie; not that I know much of it. You know,' said Mercy softly, 'that even if I could, I would not have my life there, where it is all outside; the hidden life is the true one, Ailie.'

The girl sighed. 'Ours is hidden enough here. I wish—oh, I wish!' she stopped, and looked away at the sea, her eyes full of a vague longing.

'That was not what I meant,' said Mercy.

'What, then?'

'I meant hidden with Christ in God.'

'Ah!' breathed Ailie, moving restlessly.

They had gone towards the window, and were sitting on the low, chintz-covered seat. Ailie's face was turned toward the sea again, and she was looking wistfully at the far-off purple hills that seemed to shut out the world from her.

How we chafe against such barriers when we are young, and life lies all before us! How our feet long to cross the threshold, and we weary of the calm, untroubled home-life, where other people take thought for us, and leave us to dream listlessly of getting away from them, out into the cold world, where no one cares for us! We who are older, know that the old child-life was the happiest, if we could

only have known it at the right time; and would fain go back to the happy valley again, and be cared for, and praised, and scolded, as we were long ago. But the untroubled home-life of old days is gone for ever, and we are men and women, fighting the battle of life, and taking many weary thoughts for ourselves and each other; and the child-life can come back no more, till it comes to us in heaven, when God will take thought for us, and let us be children in his mansions.

The girls need hardly have stayed away so long from Mrs. Lynne and her brother, for anything that those two had to say, although they had not seen each other since the year before, when they had met in London.

'My dearest Christian,' said Mrs. Lynne, 'you were about the last person that I expected to see. What made you think of coming now, after refusing our invitation so often?'

'A whim,' answered Mr. Osborne, in his most nonchalant manner. 'If you are not glad to see me, I'll go away again.'

'Glad! you know that I am glad; it seems only too good to be true. I feared that you loved your London life too well, ever to care to come here again.'

'Supposing—a ridiculous supposition—but just imagine for an instant that I were sick of London

and its ways, sick of my friends (by courtesy!) there, sick of everything, in fact, myself included.'

His sister looked wistfully into his face. A smile parted his lips, but it was not a pleasant one. 'You know,' she said timidly, 'that we are very quiet here; I'm afraid we can hardly get up many gaieties for you.'

'For heaven's sake don't!' he exclaimed impatiently. 'All I want is to be left alone, and see no one but yourselves. If you begin a round of country dissipation, I won't stay a week.'

'Christian!'

'I'm horribly cross, I know. I'm tired, I believe.'

'Of course you are, poor boy,' she said coaxingly. 'You shall have some tea, and some strawberries, and be petted into good humour again. I wonder where those girls have gone! Run, pets, and look for Miss Lester and Ailie.

'Who are they?' asked Mr. Osborne, when the two black-haired children had run into the house.

'They are—well there is hardly time to tell you about them just now; they will be here directly. Mr. Rose, Ailie's father, has a factory here.'

'A factory! What on earth do you have her here for?'

'Wait till you see her, O fastidious brother, and you won't ask that. Miss Lester is the children's governess, and my friend.'

Mr. Osborne's lip curled again, almost imperceptibly, but he cleared his brow as he rose to meet the two ladies who were coming across the lawn from the house. He could hardly help feeling that they were not in the least common-looking girls to whom he was presented. True, he wished that they had not been there; he would rather have found Inverurquhart House in all its native dulness than be bored by an introduction to strangers. But yet, in spite of the character, whether real or assumed, which he chose to attach to himself,—that of worn-out man of the world,—there was enough of freshness lingering somewhere about him still to cause a scarcely acknowledged pleasure in the presence of two beautiful women. It was only their beauty he saw as yet, as they stood together before him under the lime-tree, with chequered light and shadow dancing on the grass at their feet; nothing higher or deeper in them was he capable of seeing just then. Ailie's brown eyes looked wistfully up at him, with a remembrance of the bright boyish face she had been studying a few minutes ago, and Mercy's clear grave look dwelt on his face; but he saw only two extremely pretty girls, and told himself, not quite truly, that he wished they were away.

It was a pleasant enough little party that sat round the tea-table. The voices of the children sounded sweet and clear with the childish ring that

was in them, and their laughter floated musically on the still evening air. A light breeze came from the sea, and stirred the branches of the lime-tree above their heads, and shook breaths of fragrance out of the roses and mignonette in the flower-beds. Everything seemed to Mr. Osborne to be very fresh, and pure, and simple. He had just been through a London season, with all its glitter of gilding and varnish; he had seen enough of them to know that the glitter was only on the surface, and to have become weary of laughter in which he could detect the hollow ring. And the freshness of everything about him now seemed to him like the difference between the heated air and close perfume of a forcing-house, and the wild, free, heather-scented air of the hillside.

Ailie Rose was shy, and did not talk much. Mercy was often appealed to by the children, and her smile came as readily and frankly as theirs did.

Mr. Osborne found himself watching her more than once. His eye was caught by her extraordinary beauty, and the changing expression of her face. She was not in the least like any one he had ever seen before, and he had seen a great many beautiful faces during the last ten years. But he felt, as he watched her, that the expression of her face was as rare as the beauty of its features. Her smiles were both bright and frequent; but when at rest, the eyes and mouth settled into lines of sweet calm gravity.

And very few faces are most beautiful when in perfect repose.

They were all chatting merrily, eating strawberries, and drinking tea, and Mr. Osborne had apparently got over his bad temper or weariness when Mr. Lynne came home. He had come from the home farm, and walked across the grass to where they were.

'Christian Osborne!' he exclaimed, suddenly stopping short. 'My dear boy, I don't know whether I feel more surprised or glad to see you. You are welcome home again. I thought you never meant to come to us any more.'

'But I have come, you see,' answered Mr. Osborne lightly; 'and I expect you to be all the better to me because of my past delinquencies.'

'How so?' asked Mr. Lynne, laughing. 'You always had a great deal of cool impudence about you, Christian.'

'Yes, exactly; prodigals all have. That's what gives them courage to come home again. They have been just about as bad as it was possible they should be, so they expect fatted calves and all sorts of good things to be made ready for them.'

'I question whether Mercy quite approves of that version of the story,' said the Laird, catching a grave look in her blue eyes as he seated himself at the table.

She shook her head slightly, and then Mr. Osborne

noticed that her face was sorrowful in its extreme gravity.

'What fault have you to find with my statement?' he asked, turning to her suddenly.

She hesitated. 'So many, that I think I had better say nothing about it.'

'That is hardly fair,' he said, watching her with a strange kind of interest. 'You are shirking my question.'

'No,' she answered, frankly raising her eyes to his at once; 'but I have no right to say to a stranger just what I think.'

'Please waive that objection.'

'I only wondered whether you quite understand the meaning of the story you were quoting just now.'

Mr. Lynne laughed good-naturedly. 'Mercy always hoists her colours bravely, Christian. Don't be astonished at anything she says.'

'I am not astonished,' he answered; 'I got over that stage of my existence long ago. I am only slightly curious. What does Mr. Lynne mean by his allusion to hoisting colours?'

Mercy hesitated. 'I think he only meant that I like people to know which side I'm on.'

'I will not ask an explanation of that just now, said Mr. Osborne in his careless way, 'because I have a vague idea that it might involve something disagreeable.'

Mercy's clear eyes flashed with just a suspicion of fun as she answered demurely, 'I am very sorry I have made such an unfortunate impression. Indeed, I don't carry about a powder magazine with me, that you should fear an explosion.'

'You don't look as if you did,' he answered lightly. 'It seems to me,' he went on, after a pause, during which he had devoted himself exclusively to strawberries, 'that you are a very odd set of people here. There was a sailor fellow in the boat who gave utterance to one or two rather startling theories during our crossing to-day.'

'Who was he?' asked Mr. Lynne.

'Robbie M'Intosh, I believe he calls himself. He claimed to be an old acquaintance of mine. I think we did use to get into scrapes together long ago.'

Ailie Rose looked suddenly up, a bright smile lighting her brown eyes. 'Has he come home?' she asked.

'I did not know that he had been away. He was in the boat, and I took it for granted that he belonged to it.'

'He has been away on a long voyage,' said Mercy. 'I knew his ship was to come into a port further south than Inverurquhart. I am glad he is safely home again.'

'You take an interest in him?' inquired Mr. Osborne languidly, as if he thought it hardly worth the trouble.

'Yes. He is a very particular favourite of mine.'

She had hardly finished speaking when some one, who had taken the same way of entering as Mr. Osborne had done, stepped suddenly out of the shrubbery, and seeing the party under the lime-tree, stood hesitating before crossing the lawn. Mr. Lynne called out to him, 'Come away, M'Intosh;' and Robbie walked slowly forward to where they were all sitting round the tea-table.

## CHAPTER III.

### YOUNG AGAIN.

HE advanced to the back of Mr. Lynne's chair, and stood leaning slightly against it. His appearance and manner were a curious combination of thorough independence and of modesty. He looked like one of nature's gentlemen as he stood there, in his sailor's dress, his brown face flushed a little, his attitude unconstrained and graceful. He carried a light black valise belonging to Mr. Osborne in his hand.

'I have brought this, sir,' he said, 'thinking you might want it to-night, before your other things come up.'

'Why, really it was very kind of you to take the trouble,' said that gentleman, looking slightly surprised. 'One of the other fellows might have brought it up, you know, and saved you carrying it all the way here.'

'Yes,' said Robbie candidly; 'but I wanted to tell you—'

He stopped suddenly. His eye had fallen on Ailie Rose for the first time, and his brown cheeks reddened. He had acknowledged the presence of ladies by a removal of his cap and a bow; but with pardonable shyness he had not ventured to look at them particularly. A slight tremor shook his strong frame as his eyes rested on her face. She had been watching him all the time, smiling a little, but with no shade of embarrassment. Her colour had deepened, but that told nothing with her, for the delicate rose-leaf cheeks paled and brightened with the slightest emotion.

Mr. Osborne noticed the sailor's altered manner, and wondered a little what it might mean. 'You were going to say—'

Robbie withdrew his eyes from their wistful gazing at Ailie, and looked at the ground, trying to speak steadily. 'I wanted to say, sir, you used to like fishing, and I have a first-rate boat, Mr. Christian. If you would like to go among the rocks, I'll be ready any day while I am here.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. Osborne, speaking more heartily than usual. 'I should like it above all things. Can you come to-morrow?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then at eleven o'clock I will be at the pier, and we'll have a long day together.'

'The tide would suit better at ten, sir.'

'Then at ten,' he said, and Robbie turned to go away.

'You have told us nothing of your voyage,' said Mr. Lynne. 'How has it prospered?'

'Well, sir,' answered Robbie, smiling. 'I hope to go out as first mate next time.'

'That is good news,' said Mrs. Lynne; 'though I always think that yours is a profession singularly full of risks. I often feel glad that none of my relations are seafaring people.'

'The Lord has the waves in his hand as well as the corn-fields and mountains,' said Robbie seriously.

Mr. Osborne looked at Mercy, and raised his eyebrows, as much as to say, 'I told you so!' She only smiled.

'Yes, of course, I know,' said Mrs. Lynne. 'It's all very well for you who are in the middle of all the excitement and glory of danger. But think of the wives and mothers at home, lying awake at night, and listening to the wind blowing.'

'There is no one to lie awake on windy nights for me, Mrs. Lynne,' said Robbie sadly, and with a wistful look at Ailie Rose. Perhaps he wondered whether she ever heard the wind at night.

He went slowly away from them all, into the shrubbery, and out at the little gate that led into the shady road.

'It does seem sad, poor fellow!' said Mercy, after

he was gone. 'He has been so very friendless since his mother died. I think he has hardly any one to bid him welcome home after one of his voyages.'

'I wonder why he comes back here at all, then,' said Mrs. Lynne. 'Such an out-of-the-way place; there can be little inducement for him to take the trouble of coming to it when he has no friends.'

'People of that sort have strong attachments to places,' said her husband. 'Besides,' he added, laughing, 'we don't know what attraction there may be here. There may be some little sweetheart in the village for anything we can tell.'

They had all risen from table, and scattered over the lawn among the flower-beds. Ailie went wandering about, picking little bits of mignonette, and scarlet geranium, and a white rosebud or two, and putting them daintily together. Mr. Osborne walked up and down the gravel walk before the hall door, smoking a well-browned meerschaum, for, like most inveterate smokers, he had long before abandoned cigars. Mr. Lynne walked beside him, and they carried on a disjointed conversation by fits and starts. Did you ever observe that when people meet after a long absence, they generally begin to talk about rather trifling and commonplace things? It is only after they have been days or weeks together that things they have been doing and thinking about during their absence—what has

made up their lives, in fact—begins to come out; and then it comes not all at once, but dropped out by little bits at a time.

'You have cut up the lawn into flower-beds,' was Mr. Osborne's first remark.

'Yes; I was half sorry to do it. But the house is such a sombre-looking affair, I think it needs something bright near it. Do you notice how that plantation has grown?'

'Yes. It is quite a shelter now. I say, Fred, do you remember when it was planted? There are some trees there of my planting. I wonder if I could tell now which they are. They make us old men.'

'Why, so we are,' said Mr. Lynne, quite cheerfully. 'Aren't we a pair of sober, middle-aged fellows? Look at my two daughters there, shooting up nearly as fast as the pines. They make me feel my years, I can tell you. But, after all, Christian, we must be content to step aside and let the young ones take our place. I like to see my bairns playing, where you, and I, and Loo, bless her, used to play long ago.'

'Ah! it is easy for you to be content to step aside,' said Mr. Osborne, and his tone was bitter.

'What are you talking of?' asked Mrs. Lynne, coming up to them, and putting her hand within her husband's arm.

'Of feeling old,' answered he lightly. 'We needn't, when we look at you, Lopie darling. You carry your years better than any one I know.'

She looked up at him fondly. 'I'm content that we should grow old together, Fred.'

'Ah!' said her brother; 'but growing old alone is a different matter, don't you see?'

The husband and wife exchanged looks. Hers said, 'He has not forgotten;' his was a sympathetic 'Poor fellow!' and then they began to talk of something else.

'Do you know what I came upon the other day?' said Mr. Lynne.

'What?'

'Do you remember a log hut which you and Fred built, just on the edge of that plantation?'

'Yes indeed. We spent whole days there, and first-rate fun it was. Fred, do you remember our raids at night to the coal cellar, and what great wheelbarrow-fulls of coal we used to trundle down there? And then the big roaring fires we used to make, and the roasted potatoes! How good they used to taste! Why don't such potatoes grow now, I wonder?'

'Well,' said Louisa, 'I went down there the other day, and I found that precisely the same idea had occurred to my chicks. They had made friends with some of the men about, and got them to build

a log hut for them. And there they were; Fan with such a pinafore, sweeping out her house with a heather broom, and Lilly with her dress tucked up, peeling potatoes. I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, it was so like long ago. I ended by sitting down on a three-legged stool, and helping to roast the potatoes, greatly to the children's amusement.'

'Let us go down and look at it,' said Mr. Osborne, quite eagerly.

The sun was very low by this time, and the western sky was blazing with gold and purple and scarlet, the sacred colours with which God paints his cloudy curtains. The breeze came up from the sea, and whispered in the tops of the firs, and made the leaves of the lime-trees quiver with that gentle yet joyful motion which is best described in the exquisite Bible words, 'clapping their hands.' Big brown bees were flying past, going home, after their hard day's work, laden with the day's wages. The flowers smelt very sweetly; but sweeter still, as they turned into the plantation, was the pungent odour of the firs, that wildest, most subtle of all odours. I know nothing so delicious as the smell of a pine forest, unless it be the breath that rises from the earth in summer, when there has been a long drought, and then a sudden warm rain.

They passed through the plantation, and out at the other side. It was a mere belt, not a quarter of

a mile in thickness. And then they came upon the log house, snugly nestled in a green corner, sheltered by a projecting ledge, and near a little silver thread of water, that trickled down the face of the rock, making a mossy emerald bed for itself on its way.

'The little gipsies,' said Mr. Osborne, 'to hit upon just our old place!'

I am afraid that if I record what followed, my readers may think my friends excessively undignified. The truth is, Fan and Lilly had left a little store of potatoes in one corner, and coals in another. And Mr. Osborne turned up his dainty white cuffs and gold studs, and gravely proceeded to light a fire in the queer gipsy fireplace of stones. Mrs. Lynne fetched some potatoes, and her husband washed them at the spring. And then they all sat round the fire and roasted and ate them, and talked till the crimson flush died away in the west, and the blue vault above was all hung with star-lamps. And I really think that Mr. Christian Osborne was happier than he had been for a considerable time before.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MERCY AND AILIE.

MERCY and Ailie had tied on their hats, and bid the children good night. They went out together into the dim road, where the stars were shining down through the interlacing boughs of trees over their heads. The night was very still and fair; the woods on each side of the way were full of dusky hollows, where the mysterious whispering of leaves and low rustling of fern fronds were going on in the darkness. The girls went slowly down the road, hardly speaking; it was all too lovely for speech between those two, who knew what was in each other's hearts. They went on, past the shadowy woods, past a very old, solitary burying-place, where the dead slept peacefully under sheltering trees, and with the sound of the sea making a lullaby in unheeding ears. And then a turn brought them in sight of the sea, lying all shivering in the starlight, with its reflection of the sky above broken into millions of quivering

spangles. The far-off hills stood out dark and solemn against the western sky, where the faintest tint of saffron still lingered, melting into translucent green, and so blending imperceptibly with the deep blue overhead. And the shimmering, faint-shining sea at their feet was so divinely beautiful that they stood still with one accord, and gazed and gazed at it, rapt in awe and wonder.

'It is like being in church,' said Ailie, drawing a long breath. 'Or, at least,' she added, 'like what being in church ought to be, if—'

'Hush, darling,' said Mercy; 'don't let us come into the presence of the sea, and the stars, and the everlasting hills, and bring our poor little discontents along with us.'

'Yes, I know. It's mean, and I won't do it. I'll let *them* preach to me, Mercy. But one can't put it into words; one can only feel that it means something infinitely pure and grand, and trust that God is somewhere up behind those stars.'

'Somehow, on a night like this, I always feel like knowing something of the greatness of the Father's heart,' said Mercy, musingly. 'We see such little bits of things; and then everybody thinks that his little bit is all the universe, and that there is nothing beyond. But just think of God being above all this, and there, among the stars, grasping it all in his mind and heart. I don't mean that you and I are

better than other folks, Ailie; I don't set up to be better. I daresay we cling to our poor, narrow little views as well as other people. But now and then we do get a look out into the unseen and infinite, and guess vaguely that there are things quite beyond us.'

'Doesn't it make one feel very little and mean, Mercy — as if we could be of no consequence to God? He is so far off, you know.'

'Ah! no, darling. I'll tell you how I think that we are more to God than the stars are, or the sea, or the woods, or those great beautiful mountains over there. Can you imagine yourself able to *make* things, Ailie? To create something, so to speak— a picture, perhaps, or a poem, or a statue, or some beautiful thing of which you would be intensely fond and proud?'

'Yes, I can fancy doing that. You know I often dream—'

'Yes, I know. Well, these creations of yours would be dearer to you than anything else in the world besides. Dearer than any price in the way of money or fame they might bring you; they would be your own true work, things that had been brought into being by you alone. But some day, Ailie, I can fancy that you might hold in your arms a creature, very little, very weak, very ignorant. It wouldn't be able even to love you or know you; and yet, because it was your own little child, made in

your image, life of your life, you would love it infinitely better than any of your works, however great or clever they might be. And I think that somehow that must be as near as we can come to God's love for us. He has made all those grand, beautiful things beside which we feel so little; but then we are his children, his sons and daughters, made in his image, with the breath of his life in our nostrils, and something of the divine in our souls. And so He loves us; and as a father pities his children, so He pities us.'

'Oh, Mercy,' said Ailie, drawing a long breath, 'I am glad to think of myself as something more than a link in a long chain, beginning with the stars and ending with an animalcule. *That* makes one feel so far off from God, one can hardly even dare to say, "Our Father." But I wish,' she continued, speaking almost in a whisper, 'that I were really one of God's little children—in a different, a closer sense than that of which you were speaking. I am only his child now, I think, in the same way that the heathen are his children.'

Mercy smiled. 'I think, Ailie, that you are one of his own little children now, only you don't know it. There are many babies in his great family who cannot know that they are his yet. They can only cry, and stretch out their arms to Him for what they want.'

'Mercy, Mr. Cameron would not say that: he

would say that no one *can* be a child of God's without being quite sure of it.'

'You know that he and I do not think alike on all points,' said Mercy quietly. But the impulse to mutual confidence, of which both were conscious, was broken by the mention of their minister's name, and they walked on in silence.

They were going down hill, and the road led close to the seashore, and then branched off to the right and left. The way to the left led to the village, where Mercy's home was; that to the right skirted the shore for about a quarter of a mile, till it reached a point of land jutting out into the sea, on which was built the factory and dwelling-house belonging to Daniel Rose. That quarter of a mile was very solitary; its loneliness was broken only by one cottage which stood on the side next the sea, so that its back windows looked right out to the lonely shore, and the sea beyond. It was a desolate-looking little place, standing there alone on the bleak seashore, without a single neighbour; it looked more neglected than usual too, when, as at present was the case, its sole proprietor, Robbie M'Intosh, had just been away for months on one of his long voyages. The little strip of garden in front was full of tall weeds, with here and there a rose or a marigold struggling up among them in wild beauty. There was a shed at one end of the cottage, where Robbie's

boat had been lying during his absence, snugly sheltered from wind and weather, and in this shed Robbie was inspecting the state of his little craft, and her capabilities for to-morrow's expedition, when the tones of a clear melodious voice startled him.

Ailie was singing as she went past his door, and her lovely voice floated away out to sea on the still night air. She sung the words that David sung so long ago, when he was out on a starry night, very probably, and the moon was rising above the Judæan hills. She sung them in the Scottish metrical version, the dignity and beauty of which has taken such firm hold of the Scottish people, that it seems to them, in its grand simplicity, more fervent and more perfectly adapted for the praise of God than any other hymnology whatever.

'When I look up unto the heav'ns, which thine own fingers framed,
Unto the moon, and to the stars, which were by Thee ordained;
Then say I, What is man, that he remember'd is by Thee?
Or what the son of man, that Thou so kind to him should'st be?'

She was singing those words to one of the plaintive Scotch psalm tunes, of which it is difficult to tell whether they be glad or sorrowful, so curiously do they rise and fall, with the plaintiveness of their minor key mixed with something of triumph in their rhythm, if I may speak of the rhythm of a tune. She was beginning the next verse—

'For Thou a little lower hast him than the angels made,'

when she heard a quick step behind her, and then Robbie was at her side. She ceased singing, and shyly put out her hand and laid it in the broad palm that was eagerly stretched out to meet it. They hardly said a word to each other, those two friends who had not met for months; they only walked on in a sort of dream, with the stars shimmering above their heads, and the faint shining sea beside them, and the musical dash of the waves, as they broke on the stony shore, sounding in their ears. Then the factory came into sight, all blazing with lights from its many windows; and they heard the hum of its machinery, like the murmur of a million bees. It was Robbie who spoke first.

'Did you ever feel, Miss Ailie,' he said, 'as if you had dreamt things that are happening to you, or as if you must have lived them all over before, somehow, in another life?'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I have often felt so; but I didn't think that anybody else ever did.'

'I have that feeling so strongly to-night,' he said musingly. 'I seem to have dreamt of walking with you along this very road, on a starry night, and listening to the sea; very likely I have dreamt it. I think so often about home, and those at home, when I'm away, that there is little wonder if I dream about it all sometimes.'

Her brown eyes glanced up at him shyly. 'Is it very lonely out at sea?' she asked.

'Sometimes. But it is worth while being alone when one feels so near to God. I don't think I ever feel more near to Him than when I am quite alone, keeping watch, with no land in sight, and the sea and sky all about me.'

'I should like to see that, Robbie; the real wide sea, I mean, with no land anywhere near.'

'Would you?' he asked eagerly. 'Perhaps some day, when I have a ship of my own, Miss Ailie—'

He checked himself, and they walked on for a little way in silence. The next time he spoke it was about something quite different. 'I have brought some shells for you, Miss Ailie; pretty ones, I think. May I bring them some evening?'

'Yes. Thank you for remembering,' she answered.

'Remembering! as if I ever forgot.'

His voice was very low, and she scarcely caught the meaning of his words. He was to her only a dear old friend as yet, older and wiser than herself in many things, and as calm and steady as a rock. What she had become to him of late years she could not guess, and he felt the barrier between them too keenly to tell her. She gave him her hand frankly before they parted, and then ran lightly down the garden walk, and into the house.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISS LESTER.

MERCY had taken the road to the left, and it led her past some low cottages, standing each in the middle of its plot of garden, into the little town of Inverurquhart. A curious old place it was, with its quaint houses, its narrow, crooked streets, and its causeway of round stones stuck so irregularly into the ground that it was a sort of penance for unaccustomed feet to walk upon them. The streets were full of children, playing noisily in the warm summer night. Here and there a lighted shop threw a yellow gleam across the way, or red firelight shone through the window of some cottage. Every now and then there were peeps of the sea, caught at the entrance of narrow lanes leading through the fisher town down to the beach, or broader views flashed out at the shoreward turning of the wider streets. But the house that Mercy Lester went into took advantage of none of

these. It stood with its gable to the street, and seemed to have been put down for the purpose of making all its front windows stare right into a high dead wall, which shut in a small paved court in front. Yet it was not a disagreeable or chill house; it was built upon the old-fashioned model of two rooms on a flat, and each room occupied the entire width from front to back, so that they had the advantage of a cross light. Then at the end of the little paved court, opposite to the street, there were some old stone steps, and a gate leading into the tiniest and prettiest of gardens. It was astonishing how much that garden held, considering its size. There were apple-trees and currant-bushes nailed against the wall, and they always seemed to bear more than common crops of fruit. There was one great old apple-tree, of which no one could tell the age, with a gnarled mossy trunk and far-reaching boughs, that made a bower of fragrance in the spring time. These boughs stretched across a second flight of worn stone steps leading up to a door in the wall, by which one could get out to a green hillside beyond. These steps beneath the apple-tree made a charming seat in summer; and all down the edges of the path that led to them were rows of double daisies—pink, white, and crimson. I wonder why gardeners despise those dear old-fashioned flowers nowadays. One hardly ever sees them, except in some out-of-the-

way old garden ; yet to me some of these common flowers seem the prettiest of all.

Mercy entered by the little gate, and went down the paved court to the house door, which stood wide open. She went up a narrow steep stair, and into a pleasant little sitting-room on the second storey. It had, like the other rooms in the house, two windows, one looking out to the paved court and the dead wall, the other into the pretty little garden ; and the level of the garden being much higher than that of the court, this window was near enough the ground to allow any person to step out to the garden who felt so inclined. It was wide open, and the scent of beds of mignonette just outside floated sweetly into the room. There was no light, except the faint starlight ; and Mercy's eyes, accustomed as they were to the darkness, could barely discern the figure of a lady, who was seated in a large easy chair drawn close to the open window. She went quickly forward, and knelt down beside her, putting both her arms round her waist. The lady kissed her, and went on with her work ; for though the room was so dark, she was knitting a fine delicate pattern.

'You are alone in the dark, auntie, dear!' said Mercy. 'Where is Jean, and why doesn't she bring candles?'

'You forget that it's all the same to me, child,' answered a sweet, gentle voice. 'It doesn't seem of

much use to burn candles, except just for the look of it to other people.'

'I wish I could help leaving you so much alone; it vexes me to come back and find you here in the dark, with no one by.'

'Why, Mercy, dear,' said her aunt, laughing softly, 'you know I don't feel lonely; I've told you before that when God took away my sight, He gave me something more precious—the consciousness of his presence. And to sit here and feel that soft air on my face, and smell the flowers, and listen for your step on the pavement outside, is nothing like weariness for me. I like to hear the voices of the children on the street too; they are sweet at this distance, and they give me just the amount I want of the sensation of human companionship.'

'Auntie,' said Mercy, 'you'll make me think that you don't need me, or want me, or miss me when I'm away.'

Her aunt stopped her knitting to pass her hand lightly over Mercy's face, and smooth down her hair. 'My darling,' she said very tenderly, 'you know better than that, don't you?'

'Yes,' answered Mercy; and she laid down her head in her aunt's lap, and was still for a little, looking up at the stars. 'Auntie,' she said at last, 'I wish you could see, just for a minute; that sky is so glorious!'

'Tell me about it,' said Miss Lester, leaning back in her chair.

'Oh! auntie, who could describe a starry, summer sky? It is the deepest, intensest blue, almost purple in its depth, except towards the west, and there, between the branches of our old apple-tree, I can see that it is paler. Then the stars seem to hang trembling in that unfathomable blue, and all across the sky is a line of faint shining, where the milky way is. Auntie, darling, I am sorrier for you than you are for yourself, I think.'

Miss Lester smiled a little. 'The light is coming,' she said; 'I can wait. But I do want to see the sky sometimes. Do you know it is almost the only thing in connection with my blindness that I ever dream about? I have dreamt over and over again that I was out on a still summer night, and I knew that the starry sky was overhead, and when I raised my eyes to look it was all utter blackness.' The sweet voice quivered a little. Mercy kissed one of the thin hands without speaking.

'But think,' she went on, speaking very low, 'what it will be to open one's eyes in heaven! I've often thought of those blind men whose eyes our Saviour opened; what a thing it must have been for them, just to open their eyes and look straight into the Lord's face! Mercy, I'll do that. I know I won't be able to see the white angels, or the golden

harps, for looking at Christ's face. The first face I look at for years and years will be his; just think of it, darling! Isn't it almost worth while being blind for?'

Mercy could not answer; there is something so touching in the patience of a person we love and are sorry for. She laid down her head in its resting-place again, and her aunt stroked it gently.

'Sing, auntie,' she said, in a little. Then Miss Lester began to sing a very old hymn, which she had learnt years ago from her mother. Did you ever feel how extremely pathetic a sweet *old* voice is? There is something in its tremulousness, its sudden breaks, its very weakness, that is more touching than the freshness of a young glad voice, especially if what it sings have a touch of sadness. Perhaps it is the thinking of how soon those tremulous notes will be re-strung, and set to the rolling anthems of heaven, that makes us feel so.

'I think, auntie, darling,' said Mercy, when the hymn was finished, 'that it is time you had your supper.' She rose and called to the little servant maid to bring the lamp, and then began to move softly about the room, putting things to rights. It had been in trim order; but Mercy had that sort of fingers which add beauty wherever they linger, with their gentle, silent touches. After she had been round the room once, altering the position of

a chair in one place, and putting a table-cover straight in another, setting a vase of flowers near the lamp, and arranging the muslin draperies of the window, it looked as if she had been living there all day, and lent to it something of the grace of her presence. Her aunt seemed to watch her movements, if one can watch without seeing; she must have felt, with those keen subtle perceptions which are possessed by the blind, the charm of the graceful figure flitting about her.

The room was curiously furnished; it gave one the idea that everything in it had once belonged to quite a different kind of house from this old, low-roofed cottage, and as if the furniture had been preserved more from some feeling of attachment to each individual article, than because of its own intrinsic value. There was a very old bureau, made of dark solid oak, handsomely carved, and it was laden with cups and saucers of real old china. The easy chair on which Miss Lester sat was also of carved oak, and was covered with rich velvet, once crimson, but now faded to a dusky brown. Mercy brought a little round table close to her aunt's side, and laid upon it a white cloth of fine damask. She took two of the small china cups from the bureau, and brought from a drawer some old-fashioned silver teaspoons, engraved with a crest. The daintiness of those things seemed perfectly well suited to the

old lady who was to use them, she looked so daintily refined, every bit of her, from the lace cap which covered her silver hair, to the soft cashmere shawl wrapped about her, over her black dress. It was a lovely old face, too, that was turned to the light, a face on which time and patience had done their beautifying work, making up by the expressive lines about the mouth, and the sweetness of the smile, for whatever of soft colour or outline they had taken away. She was still knitting busily; it seemed marvellous that touch alone could accomplish such delicate work as that which hung from her knitting-pins. Mercy kept talking to her as she moved about, telling her little bits of news that had come to her ears during the day. She stored everything up to tell her aunt when she went home at night; it was something she had taught herself to do, for the gathering and retailing of news was by no means natural to her.

'And, auntie,' she said, as she seated herself at table, 'there has been an arrival up at the House. Mrs. Lynne's brother has come.'

'Christian Osborne?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'I have seen him. It was long ago, when he was a mere boy. He came to Greycastle sometimes to fish in the moat,—you remember the moat, Mercy?—and your dear father took a great fancy to him.

You must have been at school then, I think; it is quite twelve years ago. He was a bright-faced, eager boy then, full of life, and very enthusiastic about whatever he undertook.'

'He isn't that now, I think,' said Mercy, smiling. 'I can't fancy his ever having been enthusiastic about anything, he looks so thoroughly the reverse.'

'Time and the world change people, dear.'

'Yes; and he looks as if he had seen a good deal of what is called the world. Do you know, auntie, there is a certain class of men with whom I find it difficult to have any patience? We don't see many of them here; but now and then they do come across us. They look as if all the best part of their nature were dead, as if they had no enthusiasm, no capacity for pleasure, as if nothing were worth while. It puts me out of patience, when everything in the world is worth while, if they would only take the trouble to see it.'

'Am I to understand that Mr. Osborne is like that, Mercy?'

'I don't exactly know,' she answered slowly. 'Perhaps I judge too hastily; first impressions are so often wrong. And then, auntie, there may be such a thing as having a crust formed over one in the world. He may be all right under that.'

'Then there is a crust?'

'Yes, I think so. At least I hope it doesn't go

all the way down. But oh, auntie, I've something else to tell you. Robbie has come home.'

'Has Ailie seen him?'

'Yes.'

'The poor little rosebud!' said the old lady, pitifully.

'Why do you pity her?'

'Ah, I've lived long enough in the world to see where trouble lies, though my eyes are darkened.'

'And do you think it lies there, auntie?'

'I can only fear. God can wind up tangled skeins, child. And we only tangle them more by meddling.'

Mercy said nothing, she had a vague feeling that her aunt was right; but Ailie had never made her the recipient of any confidences; and, indeed, Mercy fancied there was nothing to confide as yet. Besides, she was not given to discuss the affairs of her friends. She rose from table, and washed the little china cups: they were too precious to be trusted to the hands of the small maid-servant.

'I think I will just run round to Willie's, auntie,' she said, when they had been restored to their place on the bureau. 'She looks for me, you know.'

'Yes, go, dear,' said Miss Lester; and Mercy put a light shawl over her head and went out again through the court and into the street. The house she entered was hardly twenty yards off; for all sorts of houses were planted down close together at

Inverurquhart, and even outside this one had a disreputable, tumbledown look, very different from the quaint old-fashionedness of Mercy's home. Inside, things were even worse: there was only one room into which the street door opened, without any sort of passage; the floor was mud, worn here and there into hollows; and there was hardly any furniture worth speaking of. A fire of peat burned on the hearth of a wide fireplace, and over it, on the bar of iron fastened to the chimney, swung a pot of potatoes. By the fire, sitting on a low stool, with her hands clasped round her knees, was a feeble-looking woman, and the firelight shone redly on her worn face. She rose as Mercy entered, and a smile of pleasure gleamed for a moment in her eyes.

'How is Willie to-night, Nanny?' said Mercy.

'Weel, she's just failing, ye ken, Miss Mercy,' said the woman.

Mercy went towards a poor bed in the corner, on which was stretched a figure so still that it seemed as if the life had already left it. The face was exceedingly peculiar, repulsively so, to those who saw it for the first time; it was more like an inanimate mask than a living face, except for the occasional flicker of a pair of faint grey eyes. Mercy stooped over her. 'Willie, is He with you to-night?'

A gleam lighted up the dull eyes. 'Ay, we're speakin' till Him, and we think He hears us.'

What wonderful, unknown lives of heroism there are in the world—heroism that is altogether unconscious, and therefore, perhaps, the more divine!

No one who saw the poor worn woman sitting by the side of her peat fire, watching her little pot of potatoes, would have been likely to guess that there could have been much of the heroic in that squalid life; yet she was one of God's own heroines, whom He had made brave, patient, enduring, with a great strong heart, filled full of love. That unlovely creature on the bed was her sister, an idiot from childhood; they had been left orphans years ago, and Nanny had clung to what seemed to others only a helpless burden, with unswerving fidelity. She had worked for her, taught her, watched her, loved her, had refused to part from her, when the doing so would have spared her half the toil of her life; and now she was beginning to know that God was gently parting them. One idea only had found an entrance into Willie's poor darkened brain: the belief in 'Him,'—she never named Him,—some One, powerful and loving, who seemed to be always near her. And as the shell in which her spirit had been imprisoned for so many years began to dissolve, the dim soul grew a little clearer, her perceptions of 'Him' were more distinct. Mercy came and read to her every evening simple stories from the New Testament, as she would have done to a very little

child. It was impossible to tell how much she understood; she looked pleased, and the dull eyes lighted up a little at the sound of His name.

And is it not wonderful that, at the sound of that divine name, glimmers of light should pierce into such blind souls as hers, that have never seen anything else? Human beauty, the most simple human learning, were sealed books to her; and only to 'Him' she clung, with her feeble, helpless hands. Have you ever noticed that little children can understand something about Jesus, long before they can be made to understand anything else? I suppose God teaches them; there is no other way of accounting for it. And Willie was one of those who are always children; the best name for such as she, is the beautiful old one, 'An innocent.'

'The dawn is not far off for Willie,' said Mercy to her aunt, when she went home. 'She will see "Him" before long.'

'We are both blind, darling,' answered the old lady. 'Her soul and my eyes: I wonder which will be the brightest dawning!'

## CHAPTER VI.

### A RETROSPECT.

I DO not know exactly the kind of life that Mr. Christian Osborne had led in London for the past ten years. It is useless for me to attempt to describe it; for descriptions of things that one only learns at second-hand are little worth, and what I do know of that sort of life has been gleaned either from books, or from people who have lived it. I do not think it was a wicked life, except in so far as all idleness is wicked, and the utter wasting of good faculties in frivolity is sin. I rather think that the life of a man, with no close ties to keep his heart pure, with no stedfast principles to guide him, with enough of money to prevent any absolute necessity for work, and with the kind of temperament that loves mere enjoyment better than any work, however noble—the life of such a man, I say, cast adrift into what is called 'society' in London, is hardly likely to be a very profitable one. As I have said, I do not know much of the life itself,

I can only judge of it by its result. I know that, at twenty-one, Christian Osborne went to London a boy still at heart, full of boyish enthusiasms, and not having yet learnt to feel ashamed of them; believing in poetry and art as the grandest things in the world; in the world as a great battle-field where he himself, a young knight-errant, might make a crusade against all sorts of wrongs, dim and undefined to him as yet, but no doubt existing somewhere for him to do battle with. Believing in love, and in religion too, in a dreamy, poetical sort of way, much as he believed in the beauty of the flowers and the sunshine. I know that he came back at thirty-one, believing hardly anything, full of all sorts of worldly cynicism, and feeling rather ashamed of any small amount of enthusiasm that happened to be left in him. Those ten years had taught him to judge of things by quite other standards than the old-fashioned ones of right and wrong, purity and guilt. He had learned that the best people are often not the most successful; goodness, therefore, was not of much account in the world, for there was one thing he believed in—success. It did not particularly matter how it was obtained: some people achieved it in one way, some in another; one might be enormously rich, and buy it, or exceedingly clever, and win it; be that as it might, it was the only thing in life worth having. As for the mere good-

ness that lives quietly and never gets a word of praise from anybody, it was simply not worth speaking about; the 'beauty of holiness' was a thing utterly devoid of beauty in his eyes; there was no beauty in it that he should desire it. You see he was blind, this handsome, clever gentleman—blinder than old Mary Lester, who saw God so clearly in the darkness—blinder even than poor Willie, with her dim visions of 'Him.'

I would like, in as few words as possible, to tell you something of Christian Osborne's history before he went to London, and one event that I know of which took place there.

He and his sister Louisa had been left orphans when they were children, and they were taken by their uncle and guardian, Mr. Lynne of Inverurquhart, to be brought up with his own son. They missed their own parents as little as it was possible they should, for the old house at Inverurquhart became home to them, in the truest and deepest sense of that word. Christian's own estate, which was not a very large one, was let; and his money matters were so well managed, that when he came of age there was a comfortable competency waiting for him to step into. He did not care to take his property into his own hands. Eagleshill was not a very interesting place, and his boyish associations were all with Inverurquhart; he preferred continuing

to draw rent for it, and going to live in London, a free man, unencumbered by having coal-mines and colliers to manage. Louisa was well provided for; she did just what everybody hoped and expected her to do, she married her cousin, Fred Lynne, and lived a happy, uneventful life at Inverurquhart.

And now for the one thing that I know of Mr. Osborne, after his going to London. During his first season there, while he still carried the boy's fresh enthusiastic heart in his breast, he met a lady, whose name it is not needful to give, as she has nothing to do with our story beyond the influence she exercised over his future life. She was very beautiful, and he loved her with all the passionate love of an ardent, poetic temperament. She was older than he, not in years perhaps, but in knowledge of the world; and for a little while his fresh young love won so upon her that she promised to marry him, and made his life an intoxicating dream of happiness. Then some one richer and more eligible came in the way, and his dream of love was broken. At first he thought his heart was too, but he got over that, and found himself a harder, wiser, more cynical man, with all his boyishness dead, and the purpose gone out of his life. I think, perhaps, if that matter had gone right with him, Christian Osborne would have been a different man, though I cannot say that he is to be excused on any such grounds.

Yet in spite of the crust of cynicism and worldliness that had grown over his heart, I believe that it was only a crust, and that beneath it the life of his soul still beat with slow faint throbs. As Christ said of Jairus' little daughter, it was not dead, but sleeping; perhaps some day or other, piercing through its closed eyelids and deadened ears, a voice might say, 'Arise!'

Mr. Osborne seemed to enjoy to the full the perfect change between life in London and in Inverurquhart. He seemed bent on taking all out of his visit that it was possible to get; and when one has considerable powers of walking, riding, and boating, a summer spent at a sea-coast Highland village, with rocks and caves to scramble among, and wide sea views to look at on the one hand, and stretches of heathery moorland and wild mountain district on the other, is by no means to be despised. Mr. Osborne spent a good many days with Robbie M'Intosh; and if he did not derive some benefit from the sailor's society, it was his own fault.

There could hardly be a more marked contrast than between those two men, one of whom believed so little, and the other so much. Mr. Osborne knew something about a considerable number of things; Robbie's actual knowledge was much more limited, and his thoughts traversed a far narrower field; but then what he did know he had learned by hard experience, and through much battling with adverse

circumstances, and he kept a good firm grip of it. But the chief difference between them lay in their different degrees of trueness. Robbie's nature was as clear as a well. His belief in God taught him to believe also in all truth, honour, and righteousness. There seemed to him such a wide difference between right and wrong, that it was hardly possible for him to mistake the one for the other; and he knew this great truth, that the rightness of a thing has nothing whatever to do with the pleasantness of it. As for Christian Osborne, I do not mean to say that he was false, but the world had taught him to be politic. And I speak now of policy, not in relation to outward things, but to his own heart. It was so difficult to know just where right left off and wrong began, they were so dovetailed into one another, and circumstances so often altered cases, that really the best thing one could do was to leave off judging things by such varying standards, and simply to do what was pleasantest at the time. He did not say this to Robbie, or even to himself, except occasionally, when he was in the mood to be particularly candid with himself, but it was after such rules that he guided his life.

Robbie interested him a good deal; he was something new and fresh to study. Mr. Osborne used to try all sorts of experiments on him, altogether, he told himself, for his own amusement; though, per-

haps, there was a spark of unselfish pleasure in seeing the sailor's earnest brown face and steady eyes light up at the sight of a book or newspaper drawn from his pocket. They would row leisurely out after breakfast into the bay, and pull towards the southern craig till they had rounded it, passing through the noble gateway out into the wider sea beyond. They would pull towards some sandy bay, let into the wall of rock, sheltered on every side by precipices, with perhaps a cave or two into which the waves of centuries had dashed. They would let their little boat float idly on the waves, while they fished for rock cod and haddocks, certainly not much worth after they were caught. But the catching them was the thing. To rock there in that ocean cradle; to feel the salt wind blowing in their faces, and the bright summer sun shining on them; to look away at the grand, wavy horizon towards the North Sea, or homewards at the blue bay, shining like a huge sapphire; to let the boat graze the rocks so closely as to be able to pick dulse off them, and so seem even to taste the sea,—those were things that made it quite worth while just to be living and breathing that free air, and seeing the sea and the shore, and hearing the plash of the water against the boat. Mr. Osborne's fishing was merely an excuse for being there. After some dozens lay in the bottom of the boat, he would pull in his line, and take either a book or a news-

paper from his pocket. He tried Robbie with a variety of things, and the result rather astonished him. Tennyson was nearly incomprehensible, the wording and the thought were both too subtle. He tried Byron, and Robbie listened gravely, but without much apparent pleasure. At last he put into his pocket a volume of *Paradise Lost*, and Robbie listened with kindling eyes to the stately march of Milton.

'You like that?' said Mr. Osborne.

'It's like the tread of an army,' he answered. 'The footsteps all keep time.'

Another day he brought Sir Walter Scott, and Robbie listened with rapt delight, first to the *Lord of the Isles*, then to the *Lady of the Lake*, and the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The reading of those things must have given Mr. Osborne some pleasure, or else he would hardly have taken so much trouble. After all, however, he was disappointed with a speech of Robbie's, which he thought at the time showed a lack of appreciativeness.

'Tell me, Robbie,' he said one day, 'which do you like best of all the books you have read?'

'After the Bible, sir?'

'Well, I wasn't exactly thinking of that. Yes, after the Bible, if you like.'

Robbie deliberated. 'I think,' he said slowly, 'I like the *Pilgrim's Progress*.'

Mr. Osborne did not know till long afterwards how nearly right the judgment was. But as that summer of 1854 went on, the news from the East became so all-absorbing that people hardly read anything except the newspapers. The Inverurquhart post-office was besieged during post hour, and bands of people went out every evening to meet the mail-gig, just to have the pleasure of seeing it come in. When Mr. Osborne went boating, he filled his pockets with newspapers; and if he stayed at home, Robbie generally walked up to the house to inquire what the tidings were.

I have told in the space of a page or two of things which were really extended over a couple of months; and as other things happened during that time, I must go back a little to pick up the thread of my story.

Mr. Osborne had been at Inverurquhart for about a fortnight, when one morning Mrs. Lynne, who was writing letters at the bow window of her pleasant morning room, saw him sauntering along the gravel walk outside. He came up to the window, and tapped on the panes, and then, when she undid the fastening, he stepped in over the low sill. He stretched himself out comfortably on a chintz-covered sofa, and looked round the room approvingly. 'You have a nice little nest in here, Louie. The etchings are Italian, are they not? Where did that little Ariadne come from?'

'Fred brought it from Frankfort,' said his sister, going on with her writing.

'I'm interrupting you, I know.' He was quiet for about three minutes, and then went on talking. 'It's so hot out of doors, and so cool in here. You look cool; that thing you have on—muslin, is it?—has a pleasant, cool sort of look, like lemon cream.'

'Christian dear, don't talk nonsense,' said his sister. But she good-naturedly shut her desk, and drawing a low lounging chair close to the head of the couch, sat down beside him, and began to sew scarlet braid on a child's pinafore.

'That's right,' he said, bestowing a lazy brotherly kiss on her soft cheek. 'What is this hot weather good for, except talking nonsense? It knocks all ideas out of one's head. Do you know that something—the heat probably—prompted me to read the *Lotos Eaters* to Robbie M'Intosh yesterday?'

'What an absurd idea! What did he say?'

'Not so absurd as you think. Robbie knows some things, I suspect, not dreamt of in our philosophy. He only said that he had never felt like that except once, when he had a fever in China. He is too wide awake for lotos-eating, such as lazy fellows like me indulge in. I'll tell you what, Louie,' he went on with sudden energy, 'I wish I had half that fellow's earnestness of purpose. It is such as he who really

enjoy life, not those who waste it in what is misnamed pleasure-hunting.'

'Dear Christian, there's nothing you mightn't be if you chose.'

He lay back again on the cushions. 'Thank you, Louie. There's some comfort in having one person to believe in me. Unfortunately no one else does, not even myself.' He lay still, watching the turning and twisting of the scarlet braid as it was sewed on. 'By the way,' he said, suddenly rousing himself, 'what an odd sort of girl that governess of yours is!'

'Odd!' said Louisa, looking up. 'I should never think of describing Mercy Lester as odd. Why do you think so?'

'Well,' he answered slowly, 'she has a curious way of considering one in the light of an abstract question.'

Mrs. Lynne laughed.

'In the first place,' he continued, 'she really is very beautiful. I don't know that I ever saw a more perfectly beautiful girl. Then she has remarkably good manners; she is very graceful, full of a certain gracious dignity that one doesn't often see. And then the provoking thing is, that it seems impossible to get her to take the least interest in one.'

'Have you been trying?' asked Louisa, looking amused.

'Yes, of course,' he answered, with an air of the

calmest assurance. 'She is so pretty—no, not pretty, the other little brown-eyed thing is pretty—so beautiful, and so clever, that it is quite worth while. The lamentable thing is that I fail. Considered merely as a human being, or as a sinner, or as a person she might possibly influence for good, she may take a calm, benevolent sort of interest in me. I believe, though, that if I were an old woman, and needed flannel petticoats, she would concern herself far more about me.'

'Very likely,' said Louisa, laughing.

'But tell me something of her, Louie. How did she come to be here?'

'It is a long story.'

'Never mind. I like stories, especially in the beginning of August.'

'You must know, then, that Mercy's father was Evan Lester of Greycastle.'

'Ah, that's it! I thought she was some one of that sort.'

'And when Mercy was a girl she lived in that fine old place, with everything about her as lovely as could be. If you saw the place she lives in now, Christian!'

'Why don't you have her to live up here?'

'Because she has a blind aunt, the most beautiful old lady you ever saw, and she can't leave her. Well, when Mercy was fifteen she went to London

to school for a year or two. Then she came back more beautiful than ever, and every one admired and loved her. As for her father, they say he quite worshipped her, and gave her everything he could think of. No one knew that he had taken it into his head to speculate in rather a rash and foolish way, I suppose, till some crisis or other occurred in the commercial world. I don't understand about those things. Fred can explain how it was. At any rate, Mr. Lester became suddenly ill after receiving some intelligence from London. He lingered for a few weeks and then died, and, to every one's astonishment, his affairs were found to be in the greatest confusion. He had taken shares in ever so many things, and none of his undertakings seemed to have prospered. Everything was swallowed up. The place had to be sold, and Mercy was left with only this old blind aunt to take care of her, who, I believe, has something of her own, I don't know exactly what—it must be very little. They came here to live in an old queer little cottage, which belongs to Miss Lester; and one day I met Mercy, and fell in love with her. Everybody does. She was quite glad to come up and teach the girls; she wanted to avoid being a burden on her aunt's hands, you know. And of course I was only too glad to get her; it isn't often one meets that sort of person in an out-of-the-way place like this.'

'No, I should think not,' said Mr. Osborne. 'Poor girl! it is a sad story.'

'Yes. And doesn't she bear it beautifully? But the saddest,—no, not the saddest,—but the most shameful part of it is to come. In the days of their riches she was engaged to be married,—and I think she must have loved him; at least I cannot fancy Mercy promising to marry any one whom she did not love,—and when the crash came, he forsook her.'

'The idiot!' said Christian, with wonderful energy for him.

'Yes; was he not? As if Mercy were not worth all the fortunes that ever were lost. I think that only her utter scorn of him can have kept her heart from breaking.'

Mr. Osborne lay silent, staring at the lawn and flower-beds outside the window, till he saw a tall, dark-robed figure come slowly out of the shrubbery, with a laughing, chattering little girl in each hand. Then he rose slowly, and sauntered out to meet them.

Mrs. Lynne watched him as he joined them, and bent his high head to speak to Mercy, who, tall as she was, scarcely reached to his shoulder; and as she looked, a sudden thought came into her head.

Now Mrs. Lynne was not a very worldly-wise woman.

## CHAPTER VII.

### ROBBIE M'INTOSH'S HOME.

THE track of warm weather, unusually long and bright for Inverurquhart, where the inhabitants had generally a large share of cold winds and wet, broke up suddenly, and a week of steady down-pouring rain, with a dull grey sky, hanging low over a grey sea, put a stop to Christian Osborne's boating. He felt rather bored after a day or two of indoor inactivity; and one afternoon he went down in the middle of the rain to Robbie M'Intosh's cottage. It looked very desolate, standing alone so close to the dreary shore, with the grey sea chafing restlessly against the stones, and the mist clinging to the hills like a shroud. Christian went through the dripping little garden, in better order now that its master was at home, and lifted the latch of the cottage door. He stepped into the low-roofed room. There was no bit of lobby between it and the outer door, and the cottage consisted only of one room on

the ground floor, and an unceiled loft above. The place was poor enough; but it was Robbie's home, and it had something of the home look about it. A peat fire burned in the wide hearth, between the couple of upright stones which served for grate. A strip of red carpet was on the floor, beneath the common deal table, and a scanty red curtain hung above the window, giving a dash of bright colouring to the whole room. Robbie's small library—it was very small—was neatly arranged on a couple of shelves that hung against the wall. They were his own handiwork, for he had a turn for carpentry, and had more than once made himself useful in that way on board ship. His bed was in a recess, and was concealed by a sliding door drawn across it during the day. The window was nearly square, and looked out to the beach and the sea beyond. On its wide sill were lying two or three old books and a slate, and Robbie was sitting there with his back towards the door. He looked round as Christian entered, and pushed away his books.

'No, don't do that,' said Mr. Osborne, going up to him before he could rise, and looking over his shoulder. 'I came down out of sheer idleness, and I have no right to interrupt busy people. I would rather help you, if I can. What are you doing?'

'Navigation,' answered Robbie, handing him a book. 'I'll be very glad of your help, sir.'

But in a very little while Mr. Osborne discovered that Robbie knew more of the matter than he did, and he said so frankly. He gave him back his book with something that sounded like a suppressed sigh, and crossing over to the fireplace, he took out of his pocket a short, well-browned meerschaum, and proceeded to fill it.

'You don't mind my smoking in here, do you?' he asked.

'No, indeed,' answered Robbie. He drew a chair towards the fire, and put on some more peats; and having made his guest as comfortable as possible, he sat down on the end of a big sailor's chest that stood against the wall and looked at him.

'This is a lonely sort of place for you to live in,' said Mr. Osborne, after he had smoked in silence for some minutes. 'Don't you feel it so?'

'Not when I'm fairly settled down at home,' answered Robbie. 'The only time I think about it is when I come home from a long voyage. The place looks empty then, till I've had time to light a fire, and put things straight a bit. And it does feel sort o' lonesome to have no one to say welcome when one comes home. But you know, sir, it's happier to live alone, right out, than to live with folks you don't care enough about.'

Mr. Osborne took his meerschaum from between his lips to give utterance to a short laugh. 'You

are a philosopher, Robbie. Do you know that you surprise me every now and then, by saying something which is profoundly true? I wonder how much caring for people you consider "enough" to make it pleasant to live with them!'

'A good deal,' answered Robbie.

'How many people in the world are there that you would care to live with, now?' said Christian, regarding him with a look of mingled amusement and curiosity. He was curious, in his lazy way, about this common man, who, oddly enough, as it seemed to him, had some fine feelings beneath his rough blue jacket, and some earnestness of purpose behind his broad, weather-tanned forehead.

Robbie hesitated an instant before he said, 'Yourself, Mr. Christian, for one. I know of only one other.'

Christian felt a little touched, though he did not care to show it. 'Myself! Man, what have I ever done that you should care for me—"enough"?'

'You saved my life once,' said Robbie in a low voice.

'Bah! I ran no risk for you. I saw a fellow seized with cramp in not very deep water, and being a good swimmer I fished him out. I would have done the same for any man, woman, or child in the circumstances. You would do it for a dog that you liked, would you not?'

'Yes.'

'Then that reason is no reason. Give me a better one.'

If Robbie had spoken the simple truth he would have answered, 'Because I love you;' but such confidences are not usual between men, so he only turned his steady blue eyes on Christian's face for a moment, and then looked away, smiling.

'People can't always give a reason for caring for people,' he said. 'I have plenty.'

'There's little enough in me to make it worth while for any one on earth to care for me, God knows,' said Christian, with sudden bitterness. 'Robbie, I'd give all I am worth to be in your place, to have some ambition, some earnestness, some purpose in life. I wonder if there was ever a more thoroughly wasted life than mine. Thirty years! and what have I to show for them? A desultory sort of knowledge, worth nothing as compared with yours, which is concentrated. You know at least how to steer a ship rightly; if I were to wake to-morrow morning, and find my pockets empty, there isn't a single thing I could do to save myself from starving. Oh, by the way, I forgot, there's an article or two in the *Friday Faultfinder* I might bring forward as a specimen of my work in this world. A glorious harvest truly!' He spoke very bitterly, and his laugh was not pleasant to hear.

Robbie looked at him wistfully. 'When you begin to know that, Mr. Christian, the evil is half cured. You have found out the weak place in the machinery; now you have just to mend it.'

'Mend it!' said the other scornfully. 'Mend a ship that is all rotten! Why, it wouldn't hold the pieces, man.'

'I don't believe that,' said Robbie stoutly. 'Besides, God can do anything.'

'Ah! He has forgotten me.' It was almost a sneer, and yet there was a tone of utter sadness in it.

'No; never,' said Robbie. 'But I'll not say but you have forgotten Him, Mr. Christian.'

There was a long silence. The blue clouds of smoke curled up from Mr. Osborne's pipe till it was smoked out, and he knocked the ashes on the hearth.

I think it showed a wonderful amount of good taste in the working man that he did not begin to preach at the gentleman, considering the many things that he had in his heart to say to him. I wish that more people had strong convictions about the efficacy of silence sometimes. Not always, nor in all cases, for there are times when one must speak; but there are seasons when the most 'instant' thing one can do is to hold one's tongue.

When Mr. Osborne next spoke, his tone was very light. 'I suppose that little brown teapot contains

tea,' he said laughingly. 'You might offer a fellow some, when he comes out on a night like this to see you.' Robbie's face brightened. All the Highland hospitality in his nature was roused; though, by the way, the Inverurquhart people are not Highlanders, but a little colony of Danes, it is said, who settled down on the north-east coast so many centuries ago that their coming is forgotten. At any rate, if he was not a Highlander—and the best proof of that which I know is, that he did not speak a word of Gaelic—he lived near the Highlands, and his notions on the subject of hospitality were worthy of a chieftain. He brought out all that his house contained, in the way of eating and drinking, and set it before his guest. Mr. Osborne leaned back in his chair, and watched him through the long lashes of his half-shut eyes with much amusement.

Now, as regards housekeeping, there are men and men,—some of the lords of creation preserve a dignified helplessness with regard to everything pertaining to the common wants of life. I have known men, who, if their womenkind were suddenly laid aside by illness, or any other cause, were as destitute as if they had been stranded on a desert island. They did not know where the sugar was kept, though it had been put into a certain cupboard, before their eyes, for a dozen years or so. As to knowing the ingredients that go to constitute a cup

of tea, they could have told you how to conduct some abstruse chemical analysis, or solved you ever so many problems in Euclid a great deal faster.

But there are other men who are fully as deft about household matters as women, and Robbie was one of those. He did his work quickly and methodically, and he did not look in the least absurd while doing it, which is saying a great deal. He brought some fresh haddocks, and roasted them over a red glowing bed of peats; he brought out oatcakes and butter, and clear heather honey, and set them neatly on the table; and then he proceeded to put sugar into the cups, and pour the tea out of the little brown teapot, and all was done with perfect neatness and dexterity.

'What a clever fellow you are, Robbie!' said Mr. Osborne admiringly.

'I've sailed as captain's steward once or twice, sir,' said Robbie quietly. 'We sailors have to turn our hands to all sorts of things.'

The two men sat down together, and Robbie did the honours of his table with a gentle courtesy that came to him naturally. As for Mr. Osborne, he enjoyed his supper heartily; and, indeed, no one could find fault with those broiled haddocks. Their talk was chiefly of Eastern affairs, as talk at all tables, and in nearly all places, was in those days. During the bright August weather, while our friends

at Inverurquhart had been pleasantly occupied in boating, in fishing, in shooting the squire's grouse on the breezy moors, and in a number of other peaceful amusements, their fellow-men had been dying by the score at Varna. A sad fate for them, poor fellows! to drop off so, at the post of duty truly, yet without the chance of glory, struck down by a disease as terrible and fatal as the Russian bullets.

'I have half a mind to go "Eastward Ho!" myself, Robbie,' said Christian, as they rose from table. He spoke jestingly, but there was an undercurrent of earnestness that made Robbie wonder afterwards whether he really meant it.

'I would, I believe,' he went on, 'if anything worth while were doing. I have hardly patriotism enough to go out and die of cholera at Varna, for the good of my country, if such a proceeding could by any possibility do any one any good.' Then he walked off in the rain, leaving Robbie alone to clear away the remains of the little feast.

That done, Robbie did not go back to his books again, but stood for a while looking thoughtfully down into the fire, and then, after lighting a candle, he raised the lid of his great seaman's chest, and knelt down before it. A good many things had to be lifted out before he came to what he wanted—one or two bright-coloured shawls, and some pieces of rich delicate silk, that were handled very tenderly

as they were taken out one after the other. He looked at one, a shiny, satiny stuff, such as one never sees except when brought out of some such far-travelled chest as Robbie's. He shook it out, and looked admiringly at its soft pearly colours and glossy texture.

'This will suit her best of all,' he thought; and a tender smile lighted up his bronzed face, and his eyes were moist. 'It looks like her; soft and fair, with no bright colour about it. But not yet, my darling, not yet.'

He came to a number of curious and beautiful foreign shells presently; and as he took them out, their shining mother-of-pearl glistened by the light of his solitary candle. He rolled them carefully up: some of them were very fragile, and required delicate handling. Then he put back all the other things into the chest, and taking his cap and waterproof coat from the pins where they hung, he opened the door and went out into the rain and darkness.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AILIE'S REBELLION.

THE land belonging to Mr. Rose, on which both his house and factory were built, was of a peculiar shape. I am not sure that I can give my readers a good idea of it, although its precise form is distinctly impressed on my own mind. It was a tongue of land running right out into the sea, as nearly as possible of the shape of the capital letter A, measuring about a hundred and fifty yards across the base, and two hundred from the middle of the base to the point. It was a very small property, and from its position it was much exposed both to the force of the waves and of the wind, but it was precious to its owner, because it had been handed down to him through many generations. His ancestry was a curious one. A hundred years ago they had been buccaneers, and this very land had been bought with Spanish gold brought home from some of their wild, lawless expeditions.

Then they had subsided into honest, brave sailors, trading in their own vessels, but showing the old buccaneer blood still in their fearless love of adventure. Mr. Rose was the first of his line who stayed quietly at home, and he had more of his mother's nature in him than of his father's. She came of a race of tough, hard, God-fearing men, who took a firm grip both of their religion and of their money, and knew how to make the best of both worlds. He had come into his little patrimony while still a young man, and at that time there was only the dwelling-house upon it, no such thing as a factory having yet been thought of at Inverurquhart. It was a plain square two-storied house, built by one of the ship captains fifty years ago, with no pretensions to beauty about it, but solid and strong enough to keep out the wild blasts that it had to face. It stood near the centre of the A, but considerably nearer the base than the point, so that its further side formed something like the cross bar of the letter. It had been built so as to obtain the greatest shelter possible on that exposed site, and so as to fill up the best situation available. Then when Mr. Rose determined to build his tweed factory, there was no site left for it except the more exposed one near the point of the A. He might have knocked down the dwelling-house, built his factory in its place, and removed his household into the town; but

he clung too tenaciously to every stone with which there was connected any old association to think for an instant of doing this. He might also have obtained land from Mr. Lynne, by paying a merely nominal rent for it; and the laird, glad to see a prospect of employment for his poor townsfolk, offered him his choice of a site, and urged him repeatedly to take it. But Mr. Rose was an extremely obstinate man; when he had once formed a resolution, one might as well talk to the rocks on the seashore as to him. He had determined to build his factory on his own land, and there he built it, in spite of all that could be said to the contrary. Nor were the Inverurquhart people slow to warn him of the peculiar danger to which the building was exposed. Thirty years ago, after the captain who built the dwelling-house was dead, and while the point was still laid out as garden ground, a great storm had swept away a considerable portion of the bank, and the waves washed into the garden, carrying away old fruit-trees that had stood there for many a winter. The Rose then in possession was a man of energy and perseverance,—of considerable engineering skill also, for he constructed a bulwark which sloped from the shore upward to his garden wall, and which was so skilfully and strongly built that it had resisted the storms of thirty winters. But it was one thing, the townspeople said, to trust

to such a barrier when it merely enclosed a garden, and another to build a house that would cost a great deal of money and contain valuable machinery on such an insecure foundation. But Mr. Rose's faith in the workmanship of his ancestor was unbounded. The bulwark was constructed, he said, at just the right angle to resist the action of the waves; it had stood for thirty years, and the great blocks of stone showed no more sign of yielding than the Craigs themselves did; he believed they would certainly last his time, and that of all those who doubted their stability; and so the square, many-windowed walls of the factory rose above the old bulwark, and vessels, sailing at night into the bay, saw its lights flaring across the water.

All day Ailie Rose had been alone indoors, reading and working by turns, with long intervening fits of gazing out at the window of her little parlour at the grey cold sea, over which low misty clouds hung. Ailie loved the sea with a love that amounted to passion. She had been born in that house, with the sound of the waves in her ears, and she had looked out at that parlour window as soon as she could consciously look at anything, and had seen just the same things that she saw now. This room, which was her own peculiar property, was on the side of the house furthest from the town, and its window looked towards the entrance of the bay.

The factory being built quite at the back of the house, did not obtrude its ugliness in front of any of the windows; and this window of Ailie's was the pleasantest of all. She had a low old-fashioned window-seat, and she was small enough still to curl herself up into it, and, resting her head in the corner of the sill, gaze out with dreamy brown eyes. She saw first a narrow strip of grass wider at one end than at the other, for as the wall of the house was straight, and the land on which it was built triangular, the space left between the house and the shore was triangular also; beyond the grass, a narrow border of flowers, which grew under the shelter of a low wall. On the other side there was, she knew, a sloping bank of mason-work, but that could not be seen from her window. Then there was the bay, then the grand gateway of the Craigs, and between them a glimpse of the deeper, wilder sea beyond. Some of the old buccaneer blood throbbed at Ailie's heart, and gave her that passionate love for the sea: she felt it most when the waves were stormiest, and came dashing against the bulwark with a thundering roar, as if they wanted to swallow up bulwark and house and all. Then her delight in them amounted to ecstasy; and as they came on, battalion after battalion, and dashed themselves down, and drew back with a long, shuddering sob, she felt as if she would like to be out among them,

fighting with them, playing with them, getting nearer them somehow, and becoming part of themselves.

The neutral-tinted sea at which she was looking, on this particular evening would have seemed sad to some people; but it did not look so to her. It was to her as the face of a friend, and she loved the grey, heaving expanse of waters, shut in and overhung by the brooding clouds. She sat curled up in the window-seat till the twilight deepened, and she could see nothing but a grey, misty curtain, through which there sounded the monotonous plash of the waves upon the bulwark. Then she left the window, and going to the fire, which was quite necessary on that damp chilly evening, she stirred the red glowing mass into a blaze, and sat down before it on the rug. The firelight showed a poor enough little room, so far as any grace or beauty of furnishing went. Mr. Rose was not the sort of man who cared to spend much of his money on tables or chairs, on soft stuffing and Brussels carpets. Horse-hair and kidderminster did well enough for all purposes of sitting and walking upon; and that was all he cared about, if indeed he ever thought of the matter at all. So the furnishing of Ailie's parlour was rather bare, and had the kind of old-fashionedness about it which is not picturesque. A square centre-table, covered with a red-and-blue checked cloth; a set of horse-hair and dark Spanish mahogany chairs,

ranged stiffly against the wall like a regiment of soldiers; an old heavy chest of drawers, on the top of which Ailie kept such treasures as she had,—a few precious books, and bits of shell and seaweed gathered from the shore;—these were nearly all; and the room looked just as it had done when Ailie was a child, for no one ever seemed to think of the possibility of changing anything in it.

She looked scarcely more than a child now as she lay on the rug, the firelight shining in her dreamy eyes, on her brown curls and sweet red mouth and pale cheeks. It was a pensive little face, yet not a sad one. All sorts of unuttered dreamings had a half expression there; it was the face of a young creature who had many things in her heart, and who had not yet learned how to give a voice to them. They were hidden deep in the poet's soul within her; she was conscious of them, of all sorts of mute yearnings, of wild longings for she hardly knew what. Just now she looked at the fire, and listened to the sea, and to the sound of the factory wheels which came to her ears in a continuous hum. She heard Bell in the kitchen crooning a plaintive Gaelic air that rose and fell like the waves, and unconsciously the two things got mixed up together in her mind, and she began putting words to them. The air was so sad, she could think of nothing that would suit it but the wail of a sailor's wife watching

for the ship that would never come. She imagined the solitary woman wailing on the shore, looking out day after day across the weary waste, listening to the cruel sound of the water, and feeling her heart cold and desolate within her, and sick with faint hope. The crooning air kept her rhythm right, and the dash of the waves outside was heard all through the little poem, and made it musical. Ailie was singing it over to herself, only half pleased with it, —for what true poet is ever satisfied with his or her own productions?—when she was startled by a knock at the front door, and then she heard Robbie's voice asking if she were within. He came into the parlour, taking off an oilskin coat that shone with rain, and she rose from the rug and held out her hand to him. He thought she looked wonderfully beautiful as she stood in the firelight,—something of the mystery and pathos of the little poem lingered still in her eyes, and her ordinarily pale cheeks were flushed by the excitement of creating something. She looked almost like a spirit to the big sailor, and he hardly dared to take her little hand into his rough palm for a minute.

He sat down near the table, and put a little bundle on it. 'These are some shells, Miss Ailie. I brought them home for you.'

'Oh, thank you,' she answered, getting hold of the bundle, and opening it as gleefully as a child does a

box of toys. 'Oh, Robbie,' she exclaimed, drawing a long breath, 'how beautiful they are! It was so good of you to bring them for me.'

Bell brought a candle, and Ailie spread out her treasures on the table. They were certainly very lovely, pearly, spiral towers, and brown bivalves with deeply serrated edges, which, when opened, showed exquisite hues of rose, pink, or tawny orange inside, curiously spiked and horned things, that looked formidable enough to protect their inmates from all attacks; and, loveliest of all, a white, fragile, paper nautilus. Robbie could hardly have brought Ailie a more precious gift than those beautiful shells, with their strange foreign look. She loved beauty; so that those graceful forms and bright colours were a treat to her, truly a 'joy for ever,' for she had the kind of nature that could take such joy. Robbie hardly needed her earnest and repeated thanks; his joy was to see her touching his gift so lovingly, and to watch her shining eyes.

'Robbie,' she said, after each shell had been examined all over, and fully admired, 'do you never wonder why God makes such beautiful things as these, when it is such a chance that anybody ever sees them? This lovely pearly thing now: I daresay there are many like it lying far down in the sea, and no one will ever see them at all.'

'Well, Miss Ailie, you know God sees them him-

self. I should think He likes to make beautiful things, just for the pleasure of making them. I think,' said Robbie reflectively, 'He *is* Beauty, just as much as He is Love and Truth. And so all He makes must be beautiful.'

'Oh Robbie,' said Ailie, with just a gleam of fun in her eyes, 'I wonder how He can put up with our church, then!'

Robbie smiled, and shook his head half reprovingly. 'I suppose He just puts up with it because those that made it didn't know any better.'

Ailie looked at her shells in silence for a little. 'Robbie,' she said at last, speaking very slowly, 'if God is pleased with those for being beautiful, just as He meant them to be, do you think He will be pleased with us for making, creating, beautiful things, if He has given us the power of doing so?'

Robbie hesitated. 'I think I hardly understand what you mean, Miss Ailie.'

'I mean this: Supposing—it is only a supposition, you know—that God had made me able to produce something that was very beautiful,—a poem, perhaps, or a picture,—would He be pleased by my producing such things?'

'Yes, I think so, Miss Ailie. I think that if you felt within you the power of making such things, you would be bound to make them, and to make them as well and as beautiful as ever you could. And when

your work was done, though the Master might see many imperfections in it, yet if you brought it and laid it at his feet, and said, "Lord, I have put my one talent out to usury, here it is grown into two talents," I believe you would get the smile and the "Well done."'

'But, Robbie,' said Ailie, 'that is not the kind of work that people speak of as glorifying God. If I could be like Mercy Lester, now. I see how her gifts glorify God; her going about among the poor, and teaching them and reading to them. But I cannot do those sort of things. And yet I feel that I am not altogether useless; that by-and-by I may do something, though in a different way. But it troubles me, Robbie.'

She turned towards him, her lips quivering and her eyes wet. She had not meant to say so much; but she had lived much alone, and the temptation to speak out what was in her heart to a sympathetic listener was too strong. Robbie was silent for a little; it touched him very much that she should confide in him so; and when he spoke, his voice trembled a little. 'I think,' he said, 'that God wants more than one kind of service, and expects more than one sort of fruit; for it is just a matter of fruit-bearing, Miss Ailie. Now just think how many sorts of trees He has made. Supposing you were to plant in your garden fruit trees of various kinds,—

apple trees, and pear and plum and peach trees,—and when you went in autumn to gather in your fruit, supposing you found apples on the first, that would be right enough; but then, if going on and expecting to find plums and pears and peaches, you found apples on all, would that not be quite wrong, and not as God meant it to be?'

'Yes, of course. Each ought to bear after its kind.'

'Well, I think it's just so with people. Maybe I'm not making it very clear what I mean, Miss Ailie, for I often have thoughts in my head that I can't well put into words; but I think that just as God makes different sorts of fruit trees, and expects them to bear different kinds of fruit, so He has made preachers, and poets, and painters, and common people that can only do the hard common work of the world, and love Him all the time they're doing it.'

'I haven't done anything yet,' said Ailie sadly.

'You must have patience,' said Robbie, smiling. 'God isn't an impatient Gardener. He knows that the sun must shine on his trees, and the wind blow on them, and the rain and dew fall on them for many a year. He doesn't expect fruit from saplings; all they have to do is to grow up and up towards the light. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient."'

'Thank you,' said Ailie, looking up brightly, 'I won't forget that. Oh Robbie,' she went on sighing, 'I wonder why I feel good with some people,—pretty good, that is,—and so wicked with others.' She had not time to explain what she meant, for just then the parlour door opened, and Mr. Rose came in.

He had been in his mill all day, perched on a stool beside a high desk, writing letters and making entries in big books, or walking round his great rooms full of machinery, giving a sharp word to some idle hand. He had come in to his tea, which Bell was getting ready for him, with his head full of figures, and machines, and orders for goods; for Mr. Rose was getting on in the world, and he knew it. His fortune had grown wonderfully since he came into it, a young man of two and twenty: though he still lived in the old house, and made no great show, it was not for want of the means to do it, if he had so chosen. He was a man of good character too, and of unblemished reputation; an honest God-fearing man, every one said, and an elder in the kirk. A little hard, perhaps; certainly fond of a good bargain, and likely to keep a firm grip of his own. But such faults, if they be faults, as those are not of the kind that militate against a man's religious character in our hard money-making nineteenth century.

He had heard voices in the parlour, and his face darkened when Bell told him that Robbie M'In-

tosh was with Miss Ailie. Robbie had done well enough for a playmate so long as she was a mere child, and he only a big, steady lad, who watched over the dainty little lady in her rambles about the shore as faithfully as if he had been a big watchdog. But now matters were altogether different. Ailie's whole position had altered since then. If certain speculations turned out well, and trade kept brisk, there was no position to which she might not aspire. This foolish friendship of her's for the sailor fellow was something that might stand in her way, and must be put a stop to—the sooner the better. He had gone into the kitchen, and stood looking down into the fire, frowning as these thoughts passed through his mind. There was a likeness to Ailie in that hard handsome face. She had taken the delicate profile, the small straight nose, and short upper lip from him, but her brown eyes must have come from her dead mother, for his were cold bright blue, like the sea on a dry day when the sun is hidden. He went to the parlour and opened the door. Robbie and Ailie were both seated at the table near each other, and he saw they had been talking very earnestly. Robbie rose as he entered, but he walked straight to the fireplace, and stood with his back to it, and his hands stuck under his coat-tails.

'Who is this you have got here?' he said to Ailie, brusquely.

'Father! You know,' she answered with a surprised look. 'It's Robbie M'Intosh.'

'Robbie M'Intosh! Eh! So you've got back, have you?' he said ungraciously. Then, without giving him time to answer: 'What are those?'

'A few shells, sir,' said Robbie modestly. 'I thought Miss Ailie might like them.'

'Shells!' Anything that was merely pretty was out of Mr. Rose's line, and he viewed Robbie's gift with supreme contempt. 'Of course, if she cares to have them, she may. You want them?' he asked sharply, turning to Ailie.

'Yes, father.'

'They seem useless trash to me, but they must have cost you some trouble to get. This will about pay you for it, I think.' He had taken a pound-note out of his pocket, and held it out to Robbie, with an air of cool insolence. Robbie's eyes went first to Ailie's face, and then to the floor. He stood perfectly still, and a dark red flush mounted to his brow. But when he spoke, his voice was very calm and steady. 'I didn't bring them for money, sir, and you must excuse my taking any. I have to thank Miss Ailie for accepting such a trifle; it is very kind of her. Good night, sir. Good night, Miss Ailie.' And he was gone before either of them had time to say a word.

Ailie had risen, and stood looking at her father,

her face very white and her eyes blazing. Now, she was generally of a very even temper, partly owing to a sort of contempt for trifles such as make ordinary people angry, and partly because of her dreamy indolent nature, which did not take the trouble of getting excited about commonplace things. Few people knew with what passion those brown eyes of her's could flash, or with what scorn those delicate lips could curl.

'Well?' said her father coldly.

'How dare you? how dare you?' she said, speaking very low and distinct.

'What do you mean?' he asked, drawing his eyebrows together till they met above his keen blue eyes.

'How dare you insult my friend? You know you meant it for an insult.'

'Your friend!' he sneered. 'A pretty friend; a common sailor fellow.'

'He may be a common sailor, but he is a very uncommon man. Besides, what are we? what are you? You don't call yourself a gentleman, do you?'

She was usually so very soft and quiet, that it had never occurred to him that she could resist his will; and he stared at the defiant little figure before him, hardly believing his ears.

'Am I your father, or am I not?' he asked with slow emphasis.

'Indeed I don't know. You are so unlike me in

everything, that I shouldn't be surprised if you were not.'

Mr. Rose was not without a grim sense of humour, and Ailie's answer was so utterly impertinent that it struck him as ludicrous, and he could hardly help smiling.

'You are not a gentleman,' she went on, drawing nearer to him. 'You may make as much money as you choose, but you never can be a gentleman. Gentlemen don't insult strangers in their own house.'

'I'll tell you what you are,' he said, getting angry. 'You are a wicked, impertinent girl. Have you never been taught to honour your father, Miss?'

'I wish I could honour him. But I hate—oh, I hate all meanness so.'

'Go to your own room,' he said sternly. He never had laid a finger on his dead wife's child, or he might have done so then, for he was very angry.

'I am going,' she said proudly. 'I wouldn't sit down at the same table with you to-night.' And she marched out of the room, and up-stairs to her little bed-chamber. Then she broke down, and threw herself face downwards on the bed, sobbing violently.

'Oh how wicked I have been! And I was feeling so good only a little while ago. Oh, what shall I do?'

Poor child! she was quite alone, and there was no one to answer her; only the rain beating against her window, and the moaning of the waves below.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A WILD EXPEDITION.

GRADUALLY she became quieter; and as she lay in the dark room, with her face pressed down on the pillow, she went over the scene that had just been acted below stairs, dwelling on each circumstance with painful minuteness. She remembered that she had not spoken a word to Robbie after her father came into the room. 'He will think that I know him no better than that,' she thought bitterly. 'He will think that I hold myself above him, don't think him good enough to be my friend, when he is, oh, ever so much better than I am—than any of us are. It was so cruel of father! Why *did* he do it?' She lay for an hour thinking such thoughts, until she could bear it no longer. She rose and washed her tear-stained face, and smoothed her hair, and then she went down-stairs. She looked into the parlour; it

was empty, and the tea things stood untouched on the table.

'Where is my father?' she asked of Bell.

'He's gone back to the mill, Miss Ailie.'

'Has he had no tea?'

'He said he didn't want any. You'll take some. I'll heat the water again.'

'I don't mind,' said Ailie. But she seated herself at the table, and drank some tea, though she allowed her bread and butter to be untasted. Bell looked at her white face with sympathy. She knew that something was wrong, and guessed that her young mistress was in trouble about Robbie M'Intosh. Of course her guesses were all in a wrong direction; but the feeling of womanly sympathy was there.

Ailie was left alone again, and the house was very quiet. Outside, the rain drove against the window, and the waves rose higher and more wildly on the bulwark; but inside there was no sound but the slight crackling of the fire, and the loud ticking of the old-fashioned eight-day clock which stood on the stairs. Ailie had formed her resolution before coming down, and she rose to put it into execution.

I hope my readers will not judge her too harshly. She was not a young lady brought up in the middle of conventional observances, but a wild little thing, who had lived all her life in a solitary old house on a wild sea-coast, who had picked up her odds and

ends of education the best way she could. And besides, she was not at all in love with Robbie M'Intosh, or her womanly instinct would have kept her from doing what she did.

She wrapped a shawl about her, putting it over her head so as to serve instead of a hat, and she went out of the parlour into the lobby. There was not a sound in the house; Bell was busy up-stairs, and the kitchen was empty. Ailie crossed to the outer door, opened it softly, and then she was standing outside in the darkness and driving rain. She ran along the garden path, opened the little gate, and went swiftly along the road to where the solitary light in Robbie's cottage was shining. When she was inside his garden gate she hesitated for the first time. 'What if he should not be alone!' she thought. She must make sure of that. She went to the window, and, putting aside the branches of an overgrown Ayrshire rose that had climbed across it, she looked in. She could see the inside of his room quite clearly by the firelight, though there was no other light there. It shone on the bare rafters and whitewashed walls of the poor little place, on his big sailor's chest too, and the little strip of carpet on the floor. He was quite alone; he was sitting beside the fire, very still, with his face bowed in his hands. One look was enough for Ailie: she went to the door and let herself in; an

easy matter, as it opened by means of a common latch.

Her footstep was very light, and he did not hear it. She went up to him and laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. He started to his feet in an instant, and stared at her as if she had been a ghost.

'Miss Ailie!'

'I couldn't rest, Robbie,' she said, 'till I had seen you, and—and begged your pardon.'

'You had nothing to beg my pardon for, Miss Ailie,' he answered quickly.

'Yes, it was because of me that—that my father spoke to you as he did. Robbie, I'm almost ashamed to look you in the face after it. But I wanted to tell you—that I didn't think—that I understood you better'—she stopped, feeling that she had made a mess of her apology.

'And did you come out in such a night, in all this rain, to tell me that?' he said with shining eyes. 'Miss Ailie, I didn't need it; I knew you would feel so; but I don't thank you the less for coming.'

He made her sit down close to the fire, and took off her shawl, which was very wet.

'I mustn't stay, you know, Robbie,' she said. 'I must go back immediately.'

'Not till you are dried first,' he said gently.

Then he knelt down, and very tenderly and reverently took off her slippers, which were, of course,

soaked through. It was a curious thing, showing perhaps something of the character of each of them, that though they were quite alone there in that solitary little cottage, with not a human being within call, neither of them felt in the least degree awkward or embarrassed. Robbie had taken off Ailie's shoes before now, when she was a wilful little child, who would run into wet places among the rocks, and get them filled with sand and stones; and she let him do it now, pretty much as she had done then.

'I was so wicked to father after you went away, Robbie.'

'Not because of me, I hope, Miss Ailie,' he said, looking up into her face.

'Yes, indeed. I was very angry, you know, and I said the hardest things I could think of to him.'

'I am very sorry,' he said gravely; 'more sorry than about the cause of it. I don't wonder at that much, since thinking it over. I understand what he meant better than you do, Miss Ailie.'

'Do you?' said Ailie, curiously. 'Tell me, please, what you think he did mean.'

Robbie hesitated, and then he spoke slowly. 'Perhaps, after all, it is better you should know. He meant to show me that I, a common man, to whom he didn't scruple to offer money, was not—need not have the smallest hope of ever winning you for my wife.'

There was a deep silence in the room for a minute, during which nothing was audible but Robbie's quick breathing. Ailie's first words were, 'Oh, I ought not to have come here.'

'And I ought not to have spoken so, when you were here,' he said humbly. 'I was led on to it. Forgive me, Miss Ailie.' He bent his head on his hands again for an instant, and then he rose from his kneeling posture on the hearth, and stood looking down at her. 'I know I'm not worthy of you, Miss Ailie. I know it was terribly presumptuous of me ever to think of such a thing; but sometimes I thought—I will have my own ship by and by, I hope. Your grandfather was no more than I will be then.'

She looked up at him, clasping her hands together in her lap. 'Robbie, you are utterly mistaken, in me at least. Those sort of things would not matter to me, if—if I cared for you.'

'And could you not?'

'No.'

She said it very sadly, she felt so sorry for him. He drew back into the shade, and was silent. She waited for some minutes, and then rose. 'I must go now,' she said.

'Yes,' Robbie answered. He went to the other side of the room and took down a rough sailor's coat from the peg where it hung. As he was wrap-

ping it round her, she looked up in his face and said beseechingly,

'Are you angry with me, Robbie?'

'Angry! No. How could I be angry with you?'

'You might, perhaps. But I want you for a friend, Robbie; and you can't be that unless you believe that no mean reasons of the kind you spoke of had to do with it.'

'I must always be your friend, Miss Ailie; and you needn't fear being misunderstood.'

He opened the door, and a blast of wind and rain came into their faces. 'You must not walk along this wet road again,' he said. 'You must let me do as I have often done before.' And without waiting for an answer, he lifted her gently, and carried her home through the rain and darkness. Neither of them spoke till he put her down at her own door. Then he only said 'good night,' and went away.

She stole up to her own room.

'I told him that I didn't care for him,' she kept saying to herself. 'Was it quite true?'

## CHAPTER X.

### UNDER THE APPLE TREE.

MR. Rose was silent and moody-looking next morning. Ailie let him finish his breakfast, and then she went up to him before he left the house to go into the factory.

'Father,' she said, laying her hand on his arm, 'I spoke wrongly to you last night. Will you forgive me?'

'You certainly did speak wrongly,' he said in a surly tone. 'You were extremely impertinent.'

'Yes, I know. I had no right to speak as I did. Forgive me, father.'

Mr. Rose was a hard man; there was a very thick crust indeed over his affections, and his soft places were not easy to get at. But Ailie was his only child, and she looked up in his face with her dead mother's brown eyes, and, at the bottom of his hard, selfish heart, he loved her. She had a consciousness of this; it must have been instinctive, for nothing

could be further from demonstrativeness than all his intercourse with her; but she did know it somehow, and partly owing to that knowledge, partly to her own fearless nature, she was not at all afraid of her father. So she not only laid her hand on his arm, but laid down her curly brown head on it, and though he made no answering sign, he did not shake her off.

'Forgive me,' she repeated.

'Well,' he said drily. Which, ungracious as it was, was as much as she expected.

'I went to Robbie's last night after I saw you, father,' she went on, speaking quite calmly, though her heart fluttered a little.

'To Robbie's!' he exclaimed, turning on her with a savage look.

She raised her head from his arm and looked steadily into his face, but did not let go her hold of him.

'Yes, father.'

'And, pray, what was the meaning of such an extraordinary proceeding?' he asked, with a sort of angry irony in his voice.

'I went to beg his pardon for the pain you had given him, and to tell him that I knew him better than you did.'

Mr. Rose shook her off now roughly.

'Upon my word! Of all the impudent, shameless

girls I ever had to do with, I think you are the first. And so,' he continued, sneeringly, 'not satisfied with having this common sailor for your lover, you must run after him to his own house!'

He meant to sting her, and he did; but she did not show it. She had got back her temper, and she would not lose it a second time.

'Father,' she said quietly, 'you know me better than that. You know that if Robbie had been my lover, I would not have put myself in his way. That I did so, is a proof that I think of him as nothing more than a friend.'

'Well, I can tell you that if this *friend* of yours comes about my house any more, I'll horsewhip him.'

Ailie laughed a little. 'I'm afraid you would find it rather difficult to do that, father,' she said maliciously. 'Robbie is taller than you, and I should think nearly twice as strong. But I don't think he will come back any more,' she added, checking a sigh.

Mr. Rose went off to his mill without more words. Ailie had not thought it necessary to betray Robbie's secret, though a keen sense of honour made her tell her father what she had done. There was no use in setting him more against poor Robbie, whose love could matter so little now to any one. She had put it from her at once without much deli-

beration; it was all over and done with, and could never be anything to her any more.

For a whole week she kept her secret, going dreaming about the house and the shore, and then she went to Mercy, in whose counsel and sympathy she had unbounded confidence. It was Saturday, and Mercy was at home; the warm weather had come back again, and Ailie found her sitting on the mossy steps under the old apple tree. She made a lovely picture as the flickering leaves above her flecked her golden hair with shadows. Ailie went slowly up between the rows of daisies, and sitting down on the lowest of the steps, she leant her head against Mercy's knee without speaking.

'What has happened to you, little one?' asked her friend, kissing the up-turned face.

'Something very sad,' answered Ailie, sighing. 'I fear that I have lost a friend.'

'That would be as sad a thing as could happen. One only makes two or three friends in one's life, and rare things are always precious. I would sacrifice a good deal to keep mine.'

'So would I. I would sacrifice almost anything I have to keep this one, except the one thing he wants.'

'Which is?'

'Myself,' said Ailie, bending her face out of sight.

'Then it is Robbie?' said Mercy, stroking the brown curls.

'Did you know? did he tell you?'

'No one told me anything, but I guessed how it would be some time ago. Now, tell me all about it.'

And Ailie told her everything—her visit to Robbie's cottage, at which Mercy shook her head, her quarrel with her father, and Robbie's confession.

'And now,' she said, when her story had been told, 'I have come to you to be scolded and comforted.'

'I think you scarcely need the scolding. I have no doubt you have reproved yourself for that escapade of yours as sharply as it deserves. As for the comfort—perhaps I can give you a little. I think that Robbie spoke the truth when he told you that he would still be your friend. As far as is possible, I think he will always be so. He is not the sort of man who would become so offended as to refuse your friendship because you cannot give him your love.'

Ailie pulled a crimson daisy, and picked it slowly to pieces. 'Do you remember the old French game of "He loves me, loves me not?"' she asked, half laughing. 'I feel almost inclined to play it, and abide by its issue. Because—it is the most difficult thing in the world to find out one's own mind.'

'When you begin to doubt, Ailie, the decision is not very far off.'

'You see there are as many arguments for him as against him. In the first place, he is a very good man. He would be a safe guide for me, and I am one of those who need a guide. I am like the waves of the sea, Mercy; as restless, and as easily influenced by doubts and difficulties as they are by wind and tide. And he believes in God, and in righteousness and truth. He is as steady as a rock. I think that, as far as human aid in those matters could go, he would help me.'

'That is nearly as strong an argument in his favour as you could use.'

'Yes. But then there are equally strong arguments against him. My father would never consent, and there would be no end of trouble. I could bear a great deal for the sake of any one whom I loved; but I am not in the least sure that my caring for him is enough to make me face all that. It is all confusion and trouble,' said poor Ailie. 'Why could he not let things alone, when I was quiet and satisfied?'

'I think I will tell you a little fable,' said Mercy, smiling. 'Once upon a time there was a little brook, which was all frozen up, for it was winter. It felt very still and quiet, and the ice that enfolded it was a beautiful glittering thing; but oh, so cold! The brook felt quite happy and satisfied. It had not a wish in the world, but dreamt on in its still-

ness, and thought that nothing could ever be different. Till one day a thaw set in, and the brook could not tell in the least what was the matter with it. Its stillness was disturbed, the chain of ice which had bound it was broken, so it was obliged to rush on over rocks and through meadows. It felt quite unhappy at first, poor little thing. It did not know that all this trouble and turmoil was only the breaking up of the frost; that spring was coming, and all the world was growing beautiful.'

Ailie was smiling, but she did not speak. Mercy went on stitching busily at her work, which was not fancy work, but rough strong clothing for the poor.

'Why doesn't somebody find out how good and beautiful you are?' said Ailie suddenly.

Just the shadow of a cloud came over the clear azure of Mercy's eyes for a moment. 'That part of my life is over. But I believe in love for all that,' she said, lifting her head and speaking steadily. '"Love is love for evermore," though there should be none of it for me. It is the divinest thing God has given us—this love of wives and husbands, mothers and children, and lovers. And if we keep it white and clean, as He meant it to be, it is the reflection of his own great love in the broken mirrors of our hearts. And,' she went on more lightly, 'I'm not going to be one of the old maids who refuse to believe in it. I am going to keep my heart green

enough to sympathize with lovers when they are true ones.'

'I don't believe you will be an old maid,' said Ailie, as she rose to go. 'Mercy, you have given me the comfort without the scolding.'

## CHAPTER XI.

### SUNDAY AT INVERURQUHART.

THERE is something in the very atmosphere of a Sunday morning that is different from all the other days of the week. There is a sense of freedom on that day, especially to those who are busy all the week, which gives them time to linger among sweet sights and sounds, and enjoy them to the full; a hushing of everyday working noises too, which lets us hear the voice of nature more clearly.

Christian Osborne went out to wander about the grounds after breakfast; and in doing so, he came on a pretty green bower in the wood that lay just beneath the house. There was a path through that wood which had been called, from time immemorial, 'The Dame's Walk,' for there many a fair mistress of Inverurquhart, now dead and gone, had paced up and down, as much secluded from the world in that green, wooded dell as if she had paced the cloisters

of a nunnery. There were seats, here and there, in grassy nooks and corners, and on one of those he found Mercy Lester, with Fan and Lily beside her.

'And so they took Him down from the cross,' she was saying, as Christian came up, 'and they carried Him into Joseph of Arimathea's garden, and they laid Him in a sepulchre made in the rock.' She stopped.

'Will you please go on?' said Christian, speaking very gently. 'And will you let me stay and listen with the children? It is so long since I have heard that story; I think I should be the better of hearing it over again.'

Mercy bent her head, and he sat down on the grass a little behind her, so that he could hear her voice without seeing her face.

Then she went on to tell, in the simplest words she could find, and without a single comment, that wonderful story of what happened eighteen hundred years ago, and which comes as freshly to our hearts now as ever.

The children had heard it often from Mercy's lips before; but what child ever wearied of it?

The man of the world listened silently, and the crust that years had formed over his better nature, seemed to soften for a little, and some drops of the dew of truth found their way through. For a little while he wished he could be something different

from what the world had made him,—that he could become as a little child again, and sit at some good woman's feet, and listen to that story as the children listened, with full believing hearts.

Not that Christian Osborne was what is called a sceptic. He had simply done what thousands of men and women are doing, what the world he had lived in did habitually—he had forgotten God. Other things had made up his life—things that had nothing to do with God's truth—things with which he would have been ashamed to bring the thought of God into contact. Thoughts of heaven, of Christ, of good and evil, had slipped away from him in the noise and turmoil, and only came back at long intervals, like a half-forgotten tune, and were pushed aside again as intruders. As he listened to the story, unheard for so long, a sense of its divine truth and beauty came over him, and he vaguely wished that he could so believe it as to feel its influence on his life.

'Was it a place like this, do you think, Miss Lester, that the sepulchre was in?' asked little Fan, looking up into Mercy's face with her clear childish eyes. 'I think that must be a little like the place.' And she pointed to a place a little way off, where the path led past a wall of rock, overhung by delicate quivering birches and green lady-ferns.

'I daresay it is, dear,' said Mercy, quite gravely.

'I never go into a garden without thinking that Jesus rose from the dead in one. Are you not glad that this is the day He rose? I daresay it was just as sweet and fair a morning as this, and the flowers must have smelt very sweetly to Him, after coming out of that dark tomb.'

The children nestled closer to her. That scene in the garden seemed very real to them while she spoke, and their tender little hearts were full of awe and love.

Mr. Osborne rose and went silently away. He did not feel worthy to listen longer to the childish questionings, or to the grave simple answers. He felt very old and worldly in the presence of those pure hearts; he remembered that long ago he too had been a child at his mother's knee, and had heard such words from her lips. How little he thought, bitterly, had those teachings availed him as yet! what a wide gulf there was between the innocent child of long ago and the man of to-day!

Half an hour afterwards, as he was going into the house, he met his sister coming out of it.

'I wish you would come with us to church, Christian,' she said. 'If it were only for the sake of appearances, you ought to show yourself there occasionally. You know you have not been once since coming here, and I'm sure I don't know what people think of you.'

'Neither do I,' said Christian coolly. 'And, do you know, it matters wonderfully little to me what they say. I think if that is your only reason for going, Loo, you might as well stay away.'

She looked vexed. 'You know it is not. I go because it is right. And you know, dear Christian, how vexed our mother would have been to think that you had given up going altogether.'

Christian had been touched a little that morning already; perhaps it was some of that unwonted softness of heart still lingering that made him say, 'Yes, I know; I have never meant to leave it off. Somehow one gets out of the habit. But I will go with you to-day, if it will please you, Loo. Wait for five minutes, and I'll be ready.'

As they went down the road towards the sea, the sound of the church bells floated up to them, made musical by distance. From upland farm and lonely shepherd's hut among the hills, and fisher's cottage by the sea, people were called by those pealing bells to the house of God. The Scotch, and especially the northern Scotch, are a church-going people. The road, as they neared the village, was covered by groups all moving in the same direction; and when they entered the church, Christian was astonished at the great concourse assembled there. It was built to hold some fifteen or sixteen hundred people; a plain square building, without much pretension to

beauty, glaring with many windows and much white-wash, and with great heavy galleries all round, but well calculated to fulfil the purpose for which it was intended—a place to preach in, and where people could hear preaching.

Christian Osborne looked round, after he was seated in the squire's pew, at that great sea of human faces, closely packed together in the body of the church, rising tier above tier in the galleries, all turned in the same direction towards the square box of a pulpit in which the minister was shortly to make his appearance, and all with something of the same expression of grave expectancy.

It occurred to him as he looked, that it must require a good deal of courage to enable a man to stand up alone in that pulpit, towards which so many faces were turned. 'Among those fifteen hundred souls,' he thought, 'there must be persons in many of the numberless phases of human experience. If the man really believe in what he is going to preach, he must consider that here there may be hearts wanting counsel and sympathy; if he believe in eternity, he must reflect that here are beings who may have drifted out into the unknown before next Sunday. There must be minds here in which evil is striving to conquer every good impulse, and doubt is struggling with belief. I daresay there is a large proportion who care for nothing, and whom it is the

preacher's business to rouse into something like moral and mental activity. I confess I am glad that it does not fall to my share to speak to those fifteen hundred people.'

I do not wish to say much about the sermon which Mr. Osborne heard that day. I believe that the preacher was a sincere Christian, and that he desired to do his duty. But there are preachers who seem to hide the tenderness of the Saviour behind the terrors of the law.

Christian Osborne listened, and the heart which had softened a little, while listening to a simple story simply told, became harder, and prouder, and more rebellious. A fierce sense of injustice took possession of him,—a hatred of those doctrines which in the Bible are so divinely qualified by being blended with the message of 'Peace and goodwill,' but which, when sent forth alone, are so terrible.

Ailie Rose—well, I confess that she did not listen much. She had that happy faculty which is given to some dreamy, poetic natures, of closing her ears and eyes to what was going on around her, and of turning her senses inward, so to speak. If she had been in the habit of listening to such sermons Sunday after Sunday, one of two things must have happened with an exquisitely sensitive temperament like hers. Either she must have sunk into the

depths of wild despair, in which case I shudder to think of what might have befallen her, or she would utterly have refused to believe them, and so have let go her hold very likely of vital doctrines, and drifted out into the sea of scepticism. Her father's pew was close to one of the windows, and she could look out from where she sat, towards the head of the bay, at the blue dancing water, all flecked with points of sunlight, and at the great solemn hills lying still and purple beyond. They preached to her.

Mercy did listen, and her clear, far-seeing eyes sometimes became very sad, and sometimes saw past the preacher to where the light of God shone on the golden streets and pearly gates of the New Jerusalem. She had a strong, brave nature, and she held her faith clear and unclouded, firmly grasping the hand of Christ.

The only preaching which truly strengthens us on our weary life journey is the preaching of Christ, and of Him alone. It is strange how, when ready to let everything else go, we still cling to that divine life, and feel that its purity, its graciousness, its strength, its love, have an influence over us when all other influences fail. Such preaching is seldom startling in its effects, but it drops on the tired, thirsty heart as softly and benignly as dew from heaven; where threats would fail to frighten, it

draws by love, and the divine influence of Christ, rained down from week to week, has still power to draw men to Him.

Mr. Osborne made no comment on the sermon he had heard, when it was over. But all the rest of that afternoon the hard fierce spirit was busy in his heart.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MERCY'S MEETING-HOUSE.

'I THINK, mamma,' said little Fan, 'I like Miss Lester's sermons better than Mr. Cameron's.'

They were sitting at tea on that same Sunday evening in Mrs. Lynne's pretty morning-room, which was used on all occasions when the drawing-room was not required. That was rather too grand for any except state occasions, and the amber silk damask was kept in Hollands pinafores, and only uncovered three or four times a year. The morning-room, with its chintz-covered chairs and sofas, its two or three good pictures, its one or two statuettes of pure parian, its comfortable easy chairs and foot-stools, was a common haunt for all the family, children included; for Mrs. Lynne was not one of those fine ladies whose children are always in the nursery, and only make their appearance for a few minutes at dessert. Any afternoon, when lessons

were over, one might find Mrs. Lynne in her morning-room busy with her letter-writing or other work, with little Fred on the hearth-rug, playing with his Skye terrier, and Fan curled up in a corner of the sofa, reading a book of fairy tales, and Lily dressing her doll. The mother was none the worse for having a good deal of her children's society, and certainly the children were all the better.

Little Fan's remark was made during the process of consuming bread and butter, and drinking very weak tea out of a jug. Her uncle, who had Lily on his other side, and was endeavouring to distribute his attentions equally between the two young ladies, gravely remarked that he daresayed he should like it best too, if she always preached as she had done in the wood that morning.

'Oh but,' said Lily, wisely, 'I don't call *that* preaching.'

'Don't you, puss? And what do you call preaching then?'

'When there are a great many people to hear.'

'Ah!' said Christian, 'then, my dear, I am afraid I know some unfortunate clergymen who never get a chance of preaching at all.'

Lily pondered this assertion, and Fan said, 'But you know, Uncle Christian, a great many people do go to hear Miss Lester. And this morning there were just Lily, and you, and I.'

'It was a very good sermon for all that. What do those children mean, Louie?'

'Mercy's evening meetings, I suppose. It is rather an eccentric thing to do; but you know she does everything so well; and the people like it. I know Mr. Cameron does not approve; indeed, he told me so; and I suspect he was angry with Fred for fitting up his barn for her. But somehow, when Mercy takes an idea into her head, she generally manages to carry it out. I never met any one with the same amount of gentle obstinacy. Fred laughed at her, and I really felt shocked when she proposed it; but she brought us both over.'

Christian left the tea-table, and strolled to the window, where he stood looking out. It was a lovely evening, calm and fair, with a glorious purple and yellow sunset, making the western sky splendid. Mr. Osborne looked at it, and whistled an air softly to himself.

'Uncle Christian ought not to whistle on Sundays,' said Fan to her mother, *sotto voce.*

'And my little Fan ought not to find fault with people older than herself,' said her mother, gently.

'The little Pharisee,' muttered Christian between his teeth, with a half laugh.

'Where is that place where those meetings you spoke of are held?' he asked aloud.

'Oh! you know it. It is that big barn behind the

home farm steading. But,' went on Mrs. Lynne, doubtfully, 'I don't know if she would care to see you there. It is intended for poor people; and though Fred and I have gone sometimes, I think she only half likes it.'

'For poor people, is it?' he said, with one of his odd laughs. 'Well, I am poor enough, Loo, as far as the coin that passes current in another world goes. So, on that score, I think I'll go. If Miss Lester doesn't like my presence, she can turn me out, you know.'

The meeting did not begin till eight o'clock, and by that time twilight had fallen, and only a very faint yellow tinge lingered where the gorgeous colouring had been an hour before. The road to the home farm steading was a quiet field one, marked by the deep ruts made by cart-wheels, and leading sometimes by green hedgerows, and sometimes edged only by the fields of slowly ripening corn. It led inland, and the horizon was shut in by low hills, over which the corn-fields crept, with here and there a belt of dark fir plantation. Behind Mr. Osborne, as he went up the gentle ascent, was the bay. He turned to look at it once or twice; it was dim in the twilight, and he could not tell where the grey water melted into the grey hills of the opposite shore.

The barn was easily found, visible some way off

by its lighted windows. When he entered, it was nearly full, and he slipped into a back seat, where he hoped to remain unperceived. He looked round the place with some curiosity. It was a large common barn, fitted up with unpainted wooden benches, to hold about a hundred people. The roof was unceiled, and the flickering light from a few oil lamps that hung against the wall threw strong lights and shadows on the rough cross beams, and on the faces of the people beneath. They were all working people—men in rough blue jackets, and women with blue cloaks, or tartan shawls drawn over their heads. There was a door at the end of the barn farthest from Mr. Osborne, and just in front of it was placed a small wooden table, and a common kitchen chair.

In about five minutes the door opened, and Mercy Lester came in alone. She sat down behind the table, and bowed her head on her hands for a minute, then she stood up, and gave out a psalm, in a clear, steady voice.

From the first Mr. Osborne noticed there was not the least sign of agitation or embarrassment visible in her manner. She stood there in her simple dark dress, her noble head uncovered, her face rather pale, perfectly modest, with a calm dignity that seemed to cover her as with a veil.

The tune was raised by a man in one of the front seats, with a high quavering voice, and every one in

the place joined in singing it. Then Mercy read a few verses; and then she prayed a short fervent prayer, extremely simple in its diction, and noticeably consisting entirely of petitions and thanksgivings. Noticeably so, because in many extempore prayers another element is introduced—that of a misplaced utterance of certain truths, of which, however valuable in themselves, we can hardly believe that the person to whom prayer is addressed requires to be informed. And then she spoke to her audience somewhat as follows:—

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MERCY'S SERMON.

'The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are unseen are eternal.'

'MY DEAR FRIENDS,—I should like for a little while to remind you of the meaning of those words. You all spend your lives almost entirely in the midst of things that are seen, and I know it is difficult for you to keep the unseen things constantly in your minds. Some of you spend your days in the factory, among the noise of machinery, and your thoughts there are necessarily given to your work. Some of you spend nights and days on the sea, fighting with the waves, giving your energies to your toil. Some, the mothers, who stay at home, and whose hearts and hands God has filled so full, are just as much in the midst of seen things there as those whose work lies out of doors. Your children are pulling at your skirts, wanting bread, or care, or tendance of some sort constantly; and in

the middle of all your house-work you have very little time to think of unseen things, with seen things pressing so closely upon you.

'Therefore I think it is well that you should come in here, out of your business and everyday work, and in the quietness remember that there are things which are unseen, and that they are greater than the seen things which press so closely about you.

'Now I do not want for a moment to undervalue the seen things. If God had thought them of no consequence, He would not have put you in the middle of them, and made your relations to them so binding. Indeed, it depends in a great measure on the way in which you fulfil your duties to those seen things, whether or no you will ever get a glimpse of the unseen things beyond.

'But the man or woman who thinks only about the things seen, has a very poor life—a life that wants the element which alone can make it beautiful and noble. And I think the lives that are seemingly richest, are often the poorest, just because they want this link joining them to the unseen; and that other lives, which seem to have hardly any grace or beauty in them at all, are really the grandest, because they are pervaded by a sense of the unseen.

'You know that, leaving those things which are revealed to us in the Bible out of the question, the best things that belong to this life are unseen. I

will speak of them first, and then go on to the more important things.

'Love is unseen. You see its effects, but the motive from which they spring is hidden. The thing which makes your homes happy, your lives worth having, which binds a household in the sweet bonds of amity, is an unseen thing. I need hardly begin to tell you what a precious thing love is. None of you, who know anything of it, would exchange that unseen coin for any quantity of the coin which you can see. It is that, the love which God has put into men's hearts, which makes home worthy the name of home; which keeps our bad, angry passions in check, and makes us ready to sacrifice our own selfish pleasure for the good of others. What a blessed thing it is to feel that, wherever you are, out on the lonely sea, or working in the mill, or out on the hills, or in the fields, there are loving hearts waiting and watching and praying for you at home; to know that faces will light up with joy when your step is heard; that the children will run to the door to meet you, and that you will be more welcome than any good fortune, any wealth or honour that could come to them! And the thing that causes all this, that brings all this gladness and light into your life, is an unseen thing, a something that cannot be bought or sold, which is as impalpable as the air we breathe. Honour is unseen. And what man is there

who would not sacrifice his life to save his honour? To preserve the honour of our country, we give our blood, our tears, our treasure, and none of us grudge the gift. To preserve our own, to keep our good name untarnished, our hands pure, our integrity unblemished, I hope there are not many here who would not join with me in saying, we would sacrifice first all we have, and then our life itself. This, too, is one of the unseen things, which all men, who are worthy the name of men, instinctively feel to be grander than anything they have ever seen.

'I might go on to speak of many other unseen things: faith and hope, the two things which keep us from drifting out to sea, and losing ourselves in the misery of despairing unbelief, which make us trust our brothers rather than suspect them, which help us to weather the storms of life, and hope for a brighter sky coming even when our sky is overclouded and our sun hidden,—those are among the unseen things. And glory, the hearing of which thrills us as we read of great battles won, whether battles fought against such enemies as our countrymen are struggling with now, or those other battles against disease, and famine, and sin, such as some noble men spend their lives in fighting,—that is one of the grand unseen things. Not that such men fight for glory, but they win it; and we are all ready

to cheer them when they come home again, wearing the laurels they have won.

'I think you will agree with me when I say that the best things in life are unseen things; what we see of them can only be the symbols of them, not the things themselves. And the man who does not feel the superior grandeur of those things, is, I think, hardly worthy to be a man; he puts himself on a level with the beasts, who, as long as they have plenty to eat and drink, and do not suffer from cold or fatigue, desire nothing higher. God has made us more difficult to satisfy; and if we are true to the nature which He has given us, no abundance of seen things will fill our hearts and lives, even so far as our present life is concerned.

'And now, to come to the infinitely nobler, better, higher life, the life that is altogether unseen, for it is hidden with Christ in God.

'The soul is unseen. That mysterious something which each of us has, and which we have the evidence of God's word for believing to be more precious than those bodies for which we care so much, is an altogether unseen thing. We cannot tell where its seat is, or of what it consists; we only know that it must live when our seen bodies shall be cold and dead.

'And as those souls of ours, so precious, and yet so guilty, are unseen, so the blood of Christ, in which

they must be washed, is an unseen blood. There is no visible fountain in which we, all stained as we are, can go and wash as Naaman washed in the river of Jordan. There is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and sinners have found it efficacious for the last eighteen hundred years; but no laborious, toilsome journey will bring you to it. As your disease is spiritual and invisible, so is its cure. Dear friends, some of you have washed in the fountain already, and have known its blessed healing. To those who have never been brought to it, I can only say, go to Christ, and pray Him to show it to you. He knows where it is, and how much need you have of it. It is weary work searching for it without his help. You may feel that you need something, you can hardly tell what, to comfort that unseen soul of yours, which keeps crying out for peace and light. And you go wandering up and down, trying to satisfy with seen and temporal things that which is unseen and eternal. Do not try those vain, empty cisterns of yours any longer. The mortal can never satisfy, never cleanse the immortal. Go to Christ, and ask Him to lead you to that unseen fountain of his blood, which, with strong agony, and travail, and bitterness of his stainless soul, He has made to be so sweet for your guilty one.

'And as this washing, this baptism of blood, by

which you enter into Christ's kingdom is unseen, so is the kingdom itself an unseen kingdom. Earthly kingdoms have their symbols of royalty—their crown jewels, their wealth, their armies, their capital. Christ's kingdom has these things, it is true, and we who are members of it know them; but to the world outside we cannot show them. All over the world, wherever there are those who call themselves by his name, Christ's kingdom extends; each one here, who has the love of Christ in his heart, is a living representative of that kingdom. But we have no golden and bejewelled regalia to show. Our regalia is the blood-stained crown of thorns, the reedy sceptre, the purple robe of mockery.

'Our wealth is our poverty of spirit, our joy of salvation, our service of love, our sorrow, our tears. Our armies wear no uniform, have no weapons; but every Christian is a soldier, willing to fight with the sword of the Spirit against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Our capital,—it is unseen as yet, but we all hope to see it some day; and often, when we are tired with our warfare here, a vision of it cheers us on. Our capital is the New Jerusalem, with its gates of pearl and streets of gold, its great white throne, and its river of pure water. Dear friends, I hope I shall meet you all by the banks of that river.

'Now all those things of which I have spoken are things that no one can see, or grasp, and yet they

are infinitely greater than any of the seen things with which our lives are filled. God's standard, by which He measures the value of things, is a different one from ours. He knows that when the end comes, and all things are tried as by fire, the infinite, eternal, unchangeable truth will come out of the trial brighter than ever, and all the little, seen, temporal things will cease to be.

'And now you must all go away out of this quiet place, where we have been thinking of unseen things, back to the seen, common things of life. But I hope you will try to remember that they are not all that you have to live for. Each one of you carries within him a part of that unseen, eternal being of which I have been speaking. And in the midst of your necessary work—in the noisy factory, or out on the stormy sea, or with your children by the fireside—try to listen, even while your seen and temporal bodies are busy with their necessary work, to the thoughts of your unseen souls, try to commune very often with your unseen Saviour, and long for the unseen city, the New Jerusalem.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE KING'S CHAIR.

WHEN she had finished she sat down, and covered her eyes with her hand for an instant, during which no one stirred. Then, in rather a low voice, she asked one of the men near her—a rough, weather-beaten fellow, with grizzled hair, and with a shepherd's plaid round him—to pray. Christian was surprised to notice in the prayer which followed that the man must have perfectly understood all that Mercy had said; for he asked very earnestly that 'they' might be kept from putting the seen things first, that they might often have glimpses of the unseen, and that they might be able to fix their eyes on the regalia of the unseen kingdom, and on the far-off walls of its capital, the New Jerusalem.'

Mr. Osborne was surprised, because at that time his class prejudices were strong: he had never mixed on any footing except that of master and servant

with the people; and he did not know the deep religious feeling prevalent among a certain portion of them. It astonished him that language, which appeared to him to be highly figurative and mystical, should be listened to, and apparently comprehended with as much ease as if it had been part of their ordinary vocabulary. He did not know that those who belong to the unseen kingdom have an instinctive understanding of its language.

After the last psalm had been sung, he watched for an opportunity to slip away unperceived. But on looking at Mercy Lester's face, when she raised it from her hand, he saw that he might pass close to her, and that she would probably never notice him. She was pale, and there was about her whole expression a curiously absorbed look. Her eyes seemed as if they saw nothing that was before them, but were fixed on something far off.

'She sees the unseen,' he said to himself; and then he rose and went out with the last of her hearers.

The moon had risen, and the night was warm and still. The pine plantations stood out black against the sky; corn-fields and grassy banks, and long lines of white road sloped away down to the shore; and across the bay there streamed a broad, gleaming bar of silver. Mr. Osborne did not feel inclined to go into the house; he lit his meerschaum, and

strolled slowly down to the beach. He went past Robbie's cottage, from the window of which a solitary light shone out towards the sea, then past the promontory where Mr. Rose's house and mill stood, and then stepped off the road down to the beach. It was too stony for easy walking ; but a little pathway ran close beside it for about a mile, leading to a seat among the rocks, which was uncovered by the sea, except at very high tides. Mr. Osborne followed the pathway as far as it went, over rough, uneven ground, across the beds of two or three streams that ran down to the shore, round some intercepting rocks, and over others, till it turned outwards towards the sea, and so brought him, after rather a steep scramble, to the curious, natural enclosure, where 'The King's Chair,' as it was called, looked out from its lofty perch across the water. There he sat down and looked about him. The high, irregular rocks with which the beach was piled all round, appeared more fantastic than ever, in the strong black shadows and white lights of the moonlight. He fancied that giants might have been amusing themselves by throwing the great blocks at each other, and had left them there ages ago in wild disorder. On the opposite side of the bay, the beach was sloping and sandy till it neared the point of the North Craig, where a wall of rock rose straight up from the sea. Away to the right,

Christian could see out between the gateway of the Craigs to the wider sea beyond, which lay murmuring to itself under the night sky. Just in front of him stretched the broad bar of silver, reaching nearly to his feet, and gradually narrowing till it was lost in the deep black shadow of the North Craig. A faint, sweet wind blew on his face; there was a great silence all around him, which the low sh-sh-sh of the ripples only made more perceptible.

For more than an hour he sat there, hardly thinking about anything very definitely, in one of those happy trances, when men cease to think, and can only feel. The exquisite beauty by which he was surrounded, the sweet sea wind, the echoes of a voice still lingering in his ears, lulled him into a pleasant, dreamy languor. Then he suddenly roused himself. 'I wonder what has come over me?' he asked himself, almost with a start; and then he laughed out loud, so that the rocks about him caught up the sound, and threw it back to him with a weird echo.

I solemnly believe that the likest thing in the world to conversion is love. I believe that a pure, true, thorough love—a love, be it understood, which is neither 'the lust of the flesh' nor the 'lust of the eye,' but which is a rousing and outcoming of all that is best, and purest, and truest in a man's nature—is the next best thing to salvation. I believe that in many ways it is salvation,—salvation from the utter

letting go of all belief in what is lovely and of good report, which is apt to overtake such men as Christian Osborne,—salvation, too, from the mantle of selfishness which they have wrapped about them, from the cowardly shrinking from all sorts of trouble that years of self-indulgence has given birth to. I know that there are many good people in the world, who would consider such an avowal little short of blasphemy; that there are many other people, who are not very good, perhaps, who will simply laugh at it as a piece of mere sentiment. A few will, I think, understand just what I mean; and the opinion of those few is worth that of all the others.

In the course of my reading, the other day, I came upon a sentence somewhat to this effect—that, after all, love is not such a very important element in life as novelists would fain make it out to be. After reading it, I laid down the paper, marvelling much as to what kind of man the author of such a sentiment might be. For I confess that, having outlived the age at which romance is supposed to predominate, I still humbly believe that to us women, at any rate, love is the most important thing in life. It is the pivot upon which all duties, all relationships, all that goes to make life full, instead of empty, turn. And it seems to me, that to be without it, without even the remembrance of it, would be to live an utterly poor and barren life,

however free that life might be, so far as outside things went, from care and anxiety. For, after all, what is it that makes up our life? Is your life, sir, the hours that you spend in your office, stuck up on a high stool, behind a desk? or is it those shorter ones, when you draw your arm-chair close to your own fireside, and put your slippered feet on the fender, and let the little ones climb up on your knees, while your wife steals her hand into yours? It seems to me that the last-mentioned half of life is the only thing that makes the other half endurable.

Christian Osborne had been a very idle man; such work as he had done had been of the most desultory kind; and yet he thought his life, such as it had been, was hardly worth the living.

However it came there, as he rose from his seat, and turned his face homewards, something of the light that was on the face of the picture in his sister's dressing-room seemed to have come back to it; a little of the 'tender grace of a day that was dead' was shining there.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE 19TH OF SEPTEMBER.

IN the north of Scotland there is hardly a finer month during the whole year than September, and the September of '54 was a particularly fine one. Bright days, with just a touch of something in the clear air that braced all one's faculties, physical and mental, and made one feel capable of climbing higher hills, and rowing or riding greater distances; moors, glowing royally in purple robes; sea, gleaming sapphire blue in the sunlight; sunsets, blazing in gold and crimson behind the grand jagged outline of the hills,—that was how the summer died at Inverurquhart. It was simply impossible for any one to stay indoors. Ailie Rose spent half her time on the beach among the rocks; Christian Osborne was either up on the moors with the Laird, or in the boat with Robbie; and Mercy Lester, and Lily, and Fan, took their schoolbooks out to the Dame's Walk, and learned what lessons were possible there.

There was a little pleasure excursion arranged for the 19th of September. Christian had promised his little nieces that he would take them round the Southern Craig, to the Chief's Couch, a curious rock, which was most pleasantly reached by water. Every one hoped for a fine day; and when the morning dawned clear and bright, Mercy and Ailie were nearly as glad as the children. There were no strangers going; Mr. Osborne had a horror of picnics—of indiscriminate picnics, that is to say; he enjoyed as much as any one a long day in the open air, with one or two friends whom he knew well enough to feel that hills, and sea, and moors were none the less beautiful because seen in their company. And by this time he had come to regard both Mercy and Ailie in that light. He liked the quiet, brown-eyed little girl, who spoke very little, but, he suspected, understood and thought a good deal. There was nothing in her which to his fastidiousness (and he was very fastidious) seemed out of tune with the voices of nature. She never jarred against his ideas of what was true and graceful, as some people invariably did. As for Mercy, Mr. Osborne had found out his own secret by this time.

They were very happy together, those four, on that bright September day, the last they spent together for a long time. Robbie M'Intosh was to leave Inverurquhart next morning to join his ship,

and his pleasure was all the more precious to him, because he suspected that it would be his last gleam of such pleasure. He knew he would remember that day with a passionate longing a month hence, when he should be far away on his voyage, among rough sailors, or alone in his night watches. Ailie's face would come back to him then, with its pale, spiritual loveliness; he would see her often in dreams, just as he saw her now, leaning over the side of the boat, dipping one of her little hands in the water, her straw hat lying in her lap, her brown hair curling softly in her neck, her great brown eyes looking down in their dreamy fashion at the sea-weed that waved to and fro far down in the clear depths over which the boat was gliding. Perhaps Ailie was a curious person for a strong, practical man like Robbie to fall in love with. But I think it was in the very intensity of her difference from himself that her great charm to him lay. She was to him what poetry was to her—a filling up of a want in his nature, a sort of impersonation of his unconscious ideal of all that was mysterious and beautiful in life. There were many things in Ailie's nature which he could not understand, he could only perceive them very dimly; but he loved her all the more intensely because of that, although he was unconscious of so doing.

Christian Osborne was on the front seat, rowing,

and looking particularly bright and handsome. He had lost a good deal of the indolent, care-for-nothing manner which had been so strongly marked when he came to Inverurquhart two months before. He had hardly a vestige of it now, as he bent to the oar, looking up into Miss Lester's beautiful face, and talking to her gaily. She was very beautiful, he thought, more beautiful than any one he had ever seen in his life before, than even that shattered idol of his boyhood. Her eyes were very clear, and wonderfully blue, as blue as the bluest line of the sea beyond the Craigs. Her brow rose above those steady eyes, broad and white, and the masses of magnificent hair shone yellow in the sunlight, for she, like Ailie, had taken off her hat, and the fresh sea-wind blew on her face. It was a grand face, a noble head; such a face as has power to stir our hearts and make us glad to look on, even when sculptured in dead, colourless marble; and which, when all glowing with life and colour, is a sight to make us thank God for having made anything so beautiful.

'Miss Lester,' Christian was saying, 'do you think Shakespeare wicked?'

'Why! what have I ever done,' she asked, laughing, 'that you should bring such an accusation against me?'

'It wasn't an accusation, only a question!'

'To question one's opinion about some things is nearly as bad as an accusation. I think the genius of Shakespeare "a wonderful creation of God."'

'I'm glad you think so. But, you know, some people, who are of your way of thinking about certain things, would aver that the devil made it.'

'I am afraid you don't know much about my way of thinking, Mr. Osborne,' she said, laughing good-naturedly. 'I know very little about the devil; but I am quite sure he is neither good enough or clever enough to make sweet Will Shakespeare.'

'Then, perhaps, you will not think me so extremely profane as I feared, if I ventured to observe —promise me that you won't be angry—'

'I don't think I shall.'

'You would have made a capital actress.' She was silent for an instant, and then said, a little sadly—

'Yes, I know. I found out that long ago. Do you know that was one of the first temptations that I had to struggle against, after I was alone with auntie? We were so poor, and I felt that I could make more in that way than in any other.'

'And,—excuse my asking,—but why didn't you? You do not seem to think all plays and play-acting wicked?'

'No. I don't know that play-acting in the abstract is wicked; but I know that, as a Christian woman, I could not conscientiously go on the stage,

as it now is. You would hardly like to see any woman you cared much about there, would you, Mr. Osborne?'

'No!' He involuntarily drew a long breath of relief at the thought that she was not there, and then went on with a smile, 'But all the same you would have made a splendid Portia. I should have liked just for once to hear you say, "The quality of mercy."'

'Should you? Perhaps I can indulge you without a stage. Shut your eyes and imagine one.' And then she repeated, 'The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven'—and so on, to the end of the passage. She had that rare gift, the power of conveying expression simply by intonation, without gesture; her voice was low, and yet had a ring in it. Christian had not shut his eyes, but as he watched the pose of the beautiful figure, and listened to the clear, musical voice, he thought that the temptation she had spoken of must have been a very strong one.

'And, oh, how glad I am that she didn't!' he said to himself again.

'I don't think the devil helped to make that,' said Mercy, when she had finished.

'Certainly not that. But you know there are some things that won't bear talking of in the same breath with that. Do you think God helped "Sweet Will,"

as you called him just now, when he was not sweet, but foul and impure ?'

'No.' She was silent for a little, and then she said, 'I can best tell you what I think about that by speaking in parables. God made his genius like a river, broad, and clear, and pure, and the devil sometimes stood on the bank, and threw stones and mud into it, but the things he threw in never became the river itself. And now, to us who read Shakespeare after all these years, the mud sinks to the bottom very much ; we are sorry that it is there, but we skip it, and it doesn't trouble the beautiful stream to us !'

They were gliding smoothly along, as near the shore as the rocks would allow them. There was a curious sort of passage at one place, where, for a considerable distance, the boat passed between the steep, precipitous shore, and a row of high pointed rocks, which formed an irregular wall, and left some fourteen or sixteen feet of deep water between them and the shore. The water in this passage was very still and clear ; by a very slight effort of the imagination, one might fancy one's self gliding along one of the water-streets of Venice, the houses on either side represented by great blocks of rock, the stratification of which was wonderfully contorted in many places, as if the huge masses had been subjected to some tremendous compression or upheaval ages ago.

The water was of a clear brown, like that of a river; and Ailie and the children found great delight in looking down into the magnificent aquariums over which they were passing. Sea-plants waved gently to and fro, like the branches of a weird, grotesque forest; shells and sea-urchins lay at the bottom; and on the rocky points, anemones, crimson and yellow, unfolded their strange beautiful blossoms. Ailie had never read Hans Anderson's exquisite story of life under the waves, *The Little Mermaid;* but something like it came into her head, and she began reciting to the children a fanciful story of sea-kings and princesses, who lived far down beneath the sea, in halls of pearl and coral. Fan and Lily listened with widening eyes, and Robbie with a mingling of amusement and admiration, as she spun out the web of her fancy.

Then they got out into the open water again, and so round the South Craig to the Chief's Couch. He must have been a giant among chieftains who lay there, whoever he was. Tradition is silent regarding him, and all that remains of him is this one name. One would like to know who the Titan chief was, and why he chose for his couch this huge mass of rock, which must have been but a hard, cold bed at the best. It stood in a recess in the shore, where the precipice swept back in a semicircle, leaving a beach half sandy, half pebbly. In the middle of it, rose

the Chief's Couch, standing perfectly detached from all other rocks. It presented the appearance of a great natural arch, and below it, in rough weather, the sea came rolling in with a hollow roar. But on this September day, the little wavelets came curling and whispering, as if they could never, by any possibility, have been guilty of any mischief, and were capable of nothing except the most innocent amusement. On the very top of the Couch was a tolerably flat plateau, covered by short grass: if the chief was wise, he must have chosen this for his resting-place. It was accessible by a scramble from the shore, and here our friends intended to eat their dinner. Robbie got his boat safely bestowed in a miniature harbour among the rocks, and then everybody helped to carry baskets and hampers to the top.

What happy scrambles those are, when one is young and strong, and ready for any amount of gleeful adaptations to circumstances! How little one minds the absence of knives and forks, and other little necessaries of civilised life, which have probably been forgotten! How delicious it is to unpack such hampers, packed by kind friends at home! what wonder as to what may possibly turn up next, in the shape of something good to eat, and as to what those mysterious little packages contain, which usually turn out to be salt or pepper! How nice sandwiches taste, and cold, hard-boiled eggs, per-

haps, because no one ever thinks of eating such things at home! The little dinner-party upon the top of that wind-blown rock was a very merry one; some of those who 'assisted' at it, thought of it very often afterwards, when bright smiles and happy voices were things to be dreamed of, and beefsteak-pies and sandwiches were worth their weight in gold! Then there was the packing up of empty dishes, and the getting of children and packages down in safety to the shore again; and then they all started off to climb the precipitous wall that surrounded the sheltered bay. It was not such a difficult business as at first appeared, for a zig-zag path led up to the top. Up this they climbed slowly, in single file, now to the right, now to the left, stopping every now and then to look back at the sea, which they were leaving farther and farther beneath them. After reaching the top, the path led for a little way under pine-trees, the stems of which rose brown and bare, like columns, till they spread out above into dark, stiff foliage. And then they were out on the moors. Is it possible for any one to describe those Inverurquhart moors, as they looked in the yellow September sunshine? Horatio M'Culloch might have brought visibly before you that gorgeous, rolling extent of purple; might have given you some idea of its depth of colour, of the exquisite harmonies, the strong contrasts made by miles of purple under an

unclouded blue sky, and girt by a belt of turquoise blue sea. He could have made you feel something of its utter, wild loneliness ; but even he would have failed to convey to you the sense of freedom, the bracing wind, the sweet wild smell of the heather, the delight of walking ankle-deep in its fragrant blossoms. Above all, he would have conveyed to you nothing of that delicious music, the sound of bees. Christian and Mercy, Robbie and Ailie, and the two children, sitting on one of the heathery slopes, involuntarily hushed their talk to listen to it ; and all round them there rose that musical, unvarying murmur, so sweet and strange, that to one who has never heard it before it sounds hardly earthly, and one begins to recall tales of fairies and brownies that haunt those solitudes.

Such companies as the one that crossed the great moor that day, fall naturally into twos. Mr. Osborne and Mercy went first, discussing, as they walked, all sorts of subjects. It is wonderful how two people who have begun to like each other very much, find out such numberless things to talk about, and argue and theorize upon! They keep finding out coincidences and differences of opinion, the one causing them nearly as much pleasure as the other. They make voyages of discovery into the unknown country of each other's minds, and are half startled by the curious sympathies they find out there. They keep

saying to one another, 'Do you know that?' 'Do you like this?' And the questions never seem intrusive, as they would be from strangers. It is a pleasant time that, before the doubts, and fears, and pains of love begin; when the new-born, unconscious love only serves to make the world seem happier, and the sunshine warmer, and everything in life sweeter,—a pleasanter time than any that comes again, I think, till the perilous voyage of love-making is over, and all its rocks and eddies safely steered through; then, when husband and wife can smile fearlessly into each other's eyes, comes a pleasanter time still.

Lily and Fan flitted about over the heather, like two great, bright-coloured butterflies, now clinging to Mercy's hand, and now to Ailie's; and then setting off together on an expedition to the top of some tempting knoll, and racing down again with glad, breathless laughter.

Ailie and Robbie came last, the most silent pair of the three. They had both agreed that what had happened on the night when Ailie made her wild expedition in the rain to Robbie's cottage, should make no difference between them. They were to stand to each other in just the same relation as before—that of true, faithful friends, as they had been ever since they were children. But now that they were alone together, for the first time since that evening, they found that it was impossible to

get rid of an embarrassing consciousness, which made any attempt to speak of ordinary things very nearly a failure. They felt it worse to be silent than to speak; and so they kept up, with praiseworthy perseverance, a disjointed conversation, full of uncomfortable pauses, and having a tendency to veer round to awkward topics. In truth, it was impossible for Ailie to forget that the man who was walking quietly by her side had told her that he loved her; to help knowing that he loved her even now, though he was saying nothing about it, but only betraying every now and then, by a chance word or tone, that the hope and brightness of his life had been taken from him. And, besides, there was the questioning of her own heart to trouble her; for all through the sunshine and the hum of the bees, she kept saying to herself, 'Is it quite true that I don't care for him?' And an unanswered question of that sort is apt to cause more embarrassment than after it is comfortably settled, and the 'caring' confessed to.

Of the two, perhaps Robbie was the least embarrassed. He was thinking, as he walked slowly across the moor by Ailie's side, having a dreamy sense of purple, and yellow, and blue all around him, 'To-morrow I'll be away; to-morrow I won't be able to see her, or hear her speak;' and he was feeling that the hope which had served to make former partings less bitter to him, was gone.

'You are going away to-morrow?' at last she said, speaking what they had both been thinking silently for the last ten minutes.

'Yes, Miss Ailie.'

'I am very sorry,' she said, timidly.

'Are you? I hardly thought you would care much!'

They were on dangerous ground again; and she hardly knew what to say next. Besides, he had hurt her, she scarcely knew why.

'You are unfair, unkind,' she said, under her breath. He turned, and saw the brown eyes full of tears.

'Miss Ailie! What have I said? Did I pain you? I only said what I thought. I wouldn't pain you for the world, dear.'

The last word came out unawares in his perplexity and distress. To downright, practical Robbie, who always knew his own mind, however little he knew about anything else, this girl of eighteen, who had first told him that she did not care for him, and was now crying because of a chance word of his, or because he was going away, he hardly knew which, was a sore puzzle. She was really crying; the moor was all a haze of blurred purple to her, and she walked on blindly, the tears rolling down her cheeks. Robbie would have given worlds to comfort her, and at the same

time into his heart, which had been heavy enough for the last fortnight, poor fellow! there crept a cheering little ray of hope, vague, but better than nothing.

'What is it, Miss Ailie? Can it be—Ailie, do you care a little for me?'

A silence, and then a timid whisper, 'I don't quite know, I can't tell. Please, Robbie, don't ask me any more just now.'

A happy mist came before his eyes. 'I won't; not another word if you wish it.' But he could not prevent his voice from being low and tender.

She lifted up her head after a little, and smiled at him. 'I don't know what made me cry just now. It was very foolish. Tell me about your voyage. "The Pelican" is your ship, is it not?'

'Yes. I have sailed in her before. I go as first mate this time.'

'And you will be home—'

'Not till after the New Year. Ah, what a long time it seems!' He drew an impatient breath, and she laughed a little. The tears were all gone now, and her face was as bright as a May morning. It was a lovely little face, flushed with a delicate wild-rose colour, with soft brown eyes glancing shyly up at him; no wonder that he looked wistfully down on it.

'You have often been away for longer than that,' she said; 'and I never heard you complain before.'

Then, as they walked on, she saw growing just at her feet a solitary spray of white heather. She stooped and gathered it. 'They say this is lucky to keep,' she said, holding it out to him. 'Will you have it?'

He took the delicate little flower, and kissed it over and over again. 'I will keep it as long as I live,' he said.

They had been walking in such a direction as to bring them down to the edge of the same precipitous wall up which they had come. It formed a promontory, the landward side of which they had crossed, so that, by skirting the edge of the cliff, they reached the top of the path leading down to the Chieftain's Couch again. It was a long walk, but a very splendid one. The sun was nearing the west, as they looked from the cliffs down to the sea below, and every ripple was tipped by golden light, which, in its constant flash and glitter of motion, was almost too glorious to look upon. The happy day was drawing to a close by the time they were rowing between the Craigs again, and the western sky was flaming out in gorgeous colours behind the blue hills at the head of Inverurquhart Bay.

I have dwelt on this day, because, as I have said, it was the last that those four friends spent together for a long time. Also because, on that same nineteenth of September, while they were gliding over

sunlit water, and basking on the glorious moors, in the East men were struggling and dying, and shouting and groaning, and storming the heights, and wading the deadly river, whose waters were frothed by the hail of shot; and there were brave hearts beating high for a little and then still and cold, and blood and unutterable anguish, for the battle of the Alma was being fought. Mercy and Christian talked of how they had spent that day when the glorious news came, and they read it together; but by that time Robbie was far away, with Ailie's sprig of white heather lying close to his heart.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN THE ARBOUR.

IT was one of the last of those glorious September days. The gardens of Inverurquhart House still blazed with that brief, bright colouring which one admires, perhaps all the more because one knows that a single night's frost will change it into a universal blackness. Scarlet geraniums still glowed in vases and in the turf-set beds; China asters lifted up their bright faces to the sunlight; stocks and mignonette were prodigal of their sweetness; and dahlias stood in stiff rows of scarlet and crimson, and purple and yellow, like detachments of regiments.

The Inverurquhart garden was an old-fashioned one. Ever so many plants and herbs grew there which have been banished long ago from modern gardens; there were broad turf walks too; and the hedges were clipped close at the sides, and at the top were suffered to retain their old knobs and

points, which had been there for generations back. And at the end of one of those long, straight, velvety turf walks there was a summer-house, a perfect bower of greenness and fragrance, with its mingled foliage of ivy and honeysuckle, sweet-briar and traveller's joy.

In this bower sat Mercy Lester. She looked very calm and fair, like one of Raphael's Madonnas, with something of the same rippling golden hair, and sweet grave eyes, and soft oval face, as one sees so often painted on the great master's canvas. The children were somewhere in the garden; she could hear their voices as she sat listening to Christian Osborne, who was standing a little in front of her, leaning against one of the wooden supports of the summer-house, and looking very far from calm.

'Miss Lester,' he was saying, and his voice was low and earnest, 'I have been very happy this summer. I have felt like a different man since coming here, more like the man that I hoped to grow to years ago. And I know how much you have had to do with my happiness. I can't bear to think of going away without you. Will you come with me when I go? I know I am not good enough for you; but will you take me, and make the best of me?'

Her face had flushed a little, and then grown pale again, while he spoke, and she clasped her hands

tightly together as they lay in her lap. But her voice, though low, was quite calm and steady when she answered, 'I am very sorry you have said this to me. I am so sorry to pain you; but indeed it cannot be as you wish.'

'Why not?' he asked eagerly. 'Tell me what stands in the way. I have thought—fancied, that you cared for me—a little. And I have never cared for any woman as I do for you.'

She looked down, silent for a minute. The leaves of the ivy fluttered in the pleasant September wind, and the voices of the children came merrily from among the flowers. 'It cannot be,' she said, and her voice sounded just a little faint.

'Will you tell me why?' he urged again. 'Is it because you think that you could not love me?'

Almost involuntarily she glanced up at him. He looked very handsome as he stood there, bending his stately head as he waited for her answer. His face was flushed and eager, and his eyes were bright; as she looked at him, she could not help acknowledging to herself that he was beautiful, that his face and form could hardly fail to find favour in any woman's eyes. Then she was conscious that the tell-tale blood had mounted to her temples, and that her lips were quivering.

'It is not that,' he went on boldly. 'You could love me, if you tried. Mercy, don't send me away.

There is no reason why you should refuse to be my wife.'

He came nearer as he spoke, and took one of her hands. She tried to draw it away, but it was held fast.

'Mr. Osborne,' she said, speaking gently and quietly, 'I think that now, as always, truth is best. I could love you'—the hot blush overspread her face again, and faded—'as you might be; as you are now, I will not allow myself to love you.'

'You can make me what you please,' he pleaded. 'I will be whatever you choose; I will do whatever you want me to do.'

She shook her head. 'You don't understand, Mr. Osborne; if I must speak plainly, I will tell you the reason why I cannot marry you. It is because it is necessary that I should respect and honour my husband, as well as love him.'

He dropped her hand, and drew back into his old position. 'Am I to understand,' he asked, with a sort of proud pain in his tone, 'that I am totally unworthy of honour and respect?'

'I have vexed you, I know. Please forgive me; you made me say it.'

He bent his head slightly, and she went on. 'But I had better go on now, as I have begun. Mr. Osborne, I have wanted to say this to you ever so often, but I felt I had no right. Indeed I have no right now.'

'Yes, you have. Say anything that you please.'

'It is just because you are so much, that I am grieved that you are not more. Mr. Osborne,' she said, losing her shyness in her earnestness, 'I have not been able to help seeing how much good there is in you. I know you would make such a noble Christian gentleman; and it is such a pity—oh, such a terrible pity, that you should waste your life as you have been doing. If I were a man like you,' she went on with flashing eyes; 'if I had your youth, and strength, and manhood, I wouldn't waste it all loitering about fine ladies' drawing-rooms, or in the things you call pleasure. Why, you think your own pleasure the great end to be lived for. That you, Christian Osborne, should be warmly housed, and well fed, and have no pain or trouble in the world—that's what you think of most importance in life. You want me—just now—because I am pleasant to you—yes, I know you do—just because, above all other things, you wish that you yourself should be happy. And yet, with all your desire for this, you haven't gone the right way about it. Just because there is really something noble and good in your nature, it refuses to be satisfied with what you give it. You are one of the people that can't be made happy by mere pleasure. You are not happy, are you?'

He was silent; he stood still, with his head bent, looking down.

'I know you are not. And you think, just now, that if you had me to be your wife, you would be happy then; but you wouldn't. After a little, when the novelty had gone off, you would tire of me, as you have done of a hundred other things.'

He looked up at her then, and she was so beautiful, with her flashing eyes and burning cheeks, that his whole heart rose up in a protest of mingled love and shame.

'I tire of you! Never. I love you, Mercy, as a man loves only once in his life. Is it because you fear that, that you refuse me?'

'No,' she answered simply; 'I hadn't thought of that. But—my husband must be one who has done something. He must be a true knight, *sans peur et sans reproche*, armed with God's armour of purity and right, and ready to fight against the evil and wrong there is in the world. He must love righteousness more than pleasure, and God more than me. Either I will marry such a one, or none at all. I will not marry a Fainéant.'

The word was said almost before she knew it; when she saw the dark red flush that mounted to Christian's brow, she would have given a great deal to recall it.

'You are very hard,' he said in a low voice. 'You

might have shown some spark of womanly pity for the man who, whatever his faults may be, has at least offered you all he could offer—his name and his love.'

There was a mingling of dignity and humility in this reproach, which she felt was to a certain extent deserved, that touched her. She rose, and going to him, held out her hand. 'Forgive me,' she said; and as he looked down at her, he saw that her eyes were full of tears. 'It was because I was conscious of weakness that I was so hard. Can you not see,' she went on pleadingly, 'that if I had not cared for you very much, I would not have said all this? Forgive me, and let us part friends.'

'Forgive you? Yes. But you might make me, not perhaps such a one as you have described, but something better than I am.'

'That is not in mortal power,' she answered. 'Any change that I could work would be comparatively superficial. There is only one influence which can change a man's whole life and heart. It is one higher than mine.'

They were silent for a good while. Then he lifted his head and said, 'I know what you mean. And I confess it makes me very hopeless. I cannot believe that such a change will ever be wrought in me. That invisible bar which you have raised between us, is a very strong one, Mercy. I would have been

more hopeful if you had told me that you had no love for me, for there would have been some chance of winning it then. As it is, I see no hope.' He looked at her wistfully again, and then he said, 'God bless you, dear!' and went away. She saw him go up between the long rows of dahlias, and when she lost sight of him as he turned away from the house, and went towards the wood, she bowed her head down on her hands and prayed.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FAREWELL.

MR. OSBORNE walked about the woods for a good while without heeding much where he was going. At last he came out upon the high road, just at the point where it turned towards the sea, and crossing it, he struck along a field-path that led down to the east shore. It brought him out on the beach, where it began to grow rocky, and he found, after a while, that he was following the same rough path by which he had gone a week or two before to the King's Chair. He would, perhaps, have hardly chosen to go to that particular place on this afternoon, for he remembered well enough what his thoughts had been the last time that he sat there. But now that he was so near it, he might as well go on: there is, after all, a kind of pleasure in visiting places where we have dreamt happy dreams, after the dream has faded;

something of the same feeling prompts us to go and look at the graves of people whom we have loved.

He climbed to the great, rough seat, and drew out his old friend, the brown meerschaum. And then, as he puffed away at it, and saw the smoke wreaths floated away eastwards by the gentle wind, he began to think. It is very seldom that one carries on a clear, definite train of thought. Indeed, I am not sure that among average people, however conscientious they may be, real downright thinking is by any means a common occupation. For the most part, we allow our minds to drift along without making much effort to guide them into any particular path. And thinking, properly so called, involves a continued effort, and a resisting of the temptation to stray into mere dreaming or remembering.

He was feeling hurt and sore, to an extent that he could hardly have believed possible six months before. And yet, in the middle of his pain, there was a curious feeling of exultation that Mercy had been true to herself. He had enough of innate nobleness in him to be glad that she remained to him still, though far off, his ideal woman, pure from any stain, as far as he could see, of worldliness or selfishness. In spite of her reproaches, and the sting which had been in her words, there was a keen pleasure in thinking that there was one woman whose eyes had refused to be blinded by his fair

exterior, and who, even while she loved him, had the courage to accuse him.

'And I was fool enough,' he said to himself, with a bitter little laugh, 'to think that because she was poor and lonely, she might feel honoured by my offer of a home and a husband. I don't believe that she ever thought of the difference it would make in her position. Position! What has a woman like that to do with position? She is above it. When I am in her presence, I feel that all the absurd social cant that I have been believing in all these years, becomes meaningless. The standards by which I have been measuring things are all false and wrong. When she looks at me with those bright steady eyes of hers, I begin to understand a little of how all the pettiness and hollowness of the life I have been leading must look, when the light of God's truth is turned on them.'

The evening was waning when he turned homewards, and the sea and sky were all golden and shining. He went slowly along the shore, and up the road, taking a silent good-bye of all the old landmarks, for he had determined to leave Inverurquhart the next morning. He told his sister so when he went into the house, and met her coming out of her dressing-room.

'My dear Christian, what do you mean by going so suddenly? You didn't think of it this morning.'

'No,' said her brother quietly. 'But something has happened since then to make me change my mind.'

'Something happened! What?'

'Come in here and I will tell you.' He drew her into the morning-room, and they sat down together on the sofa, and then he told her the simple fact, that he had asked Mercy Lester to marry him, and that she had refused.

Louisa was terribly disappointed. She had seen what was coming long ago, and had hoped that it might turn out differently.

'She was just the woman to suit you, Christian,' she said, mournfully, 'in spite of all her odd notions. You are fastidious about girls, you know, and she is not like the commonplace girls one meets every day. And she is so wonderfully beautiful! People, in your set, I mean, would have forgiven everything as soon as they saw her.'

Christian shook his head, and smiled a little. 'Their opinion would have mattered very little to Mercy, Loo. She is above that sort of thing.'

'She is above everything earthly,' said Louisa, pettishly. 'She is the most aggravating creature I know. To think of a girl without a penny refusing you, when you did her the honour to ask her! And it would have been a home for her—'

'I don't think she thought of that at all.'

'No, of course she didn't. She is above that too, I suppose! I could beat her. What made her do it? I thought she liked you.'

Mr. Osborne sighed. 'I am not good enough for her, Loo. No, don't look angry, dear. I am in earnest. I truly believe she was right to do as she has done. I am not so bad but what I can see that.'

He leant his head on his hands. Mrs. Lynne tapped her little foot impatiently on the floor. I think she did indulge the wish to slap Mercy Lester just then.

'But I want to ask you, Loo, not to let this alter your friendship for her. She is nearly alone in the world, you know. Don't let me have the pain of feeling that I have taken one of her few friends from her.'

'I will do all I can. I won't promise to be just the same as ever to her. I don't know that I could.'

'In a little while she will win you back to her.'

'Yes, I daresay,' Mrs. Lynne acknowledged. 'She does all sorts of things, and then fascinates you into believing them right.'

'I think she is generally right,' said Christian, smiling faintly. And then he went away to dress for dinner, leaving Mrs. Lynne time to say a word or two to her husband, which prevented his questions and regrets from being too pressing.

He went early to his own room, pleading as an

excuse that he had all his packing to do. It was a pleasant, low-roofed room, with square, diamond-paned lattice windows,—the same room that had been 'Master Christian's' long ago, in the days of his boyhood. A reminiscence of those early days still stood above the mantleshelf: a handsome three-masted ship, splendidly rigged, with every rope and pulley complete. He went and looked at it now, remembering the hours that Robbie and he had spent over it in that very room, and how they had been scolded for littering the carpet with chips. 'What an enthusiastic fellow I was in those days!' he said to himself; 'I wonder where it has all gone to.' And then he thought that if he had known Mercy while the fervid, boyish heart still beat in his breast, before the world had laid its cold hand on him, all his life might have been different. 'She might have made me something like the true knight she spoke of, *sans peur et sans reproche*'—and then he bent his head and groaned to think how different from that he was. Not that he blamed his fate, or his circumstances, or anything but himself for the falling from his own ideal of long ago, which came before him like a vision to-night. He had been weak and cowardly, yielding to circumstances instead of overcoming them; and the vision of what he might have been smiled at him from those long-past boyish days. The sort of knighthood that

Mercy had spoken of, was not in fashion among the young men of his day; earnestness and righteousness, purity and generosity, were things that had somehow slipped out of their remembrances, while they were seeking how to get the greatest amount of pleasure out of their lives, and estimating people according to their balance at the bankers'.

He went to the window, and looked out at the open lattice. A clear harvest moon rode overhead, and the dark pine-woods and sloping corn-fields were as visible as by daylight. A light breeze was blowing, scarcely bowing the tops of the fir-trees, and sweeping softly over the ears of bending corn. As he looked out, he took a sudden longing to see Mercy once more, and bid her good-bye. She had not been at tea, as he expected, having gone home earlier than usual, and he had not had the chance of holding her hand once more in his. He left his room quietly, and in another minute was out on the road, walking towards the town. The sea had roughened since the afternoon, and was quivering, and leaping, and sinking down again, as if a great longing was at its heart to reach higher, and it sobbed and fretted itself in vain because of it. The town was hardly asleep yet, for the hour was still early; and groups of people lounged at the corners of the streets, and children played about the uneven causeways.

And then he saw her, only for a minute. Not in the house; for, just as he was turning into the quaint little stone court, she came out of one of the poor houses close by. He heard her step behind him, and turning, he saw her, looking fair in the moonlight.

'Mr. Osborne!' The exclamation was a little startled.

'Forgive me for troubling you again,' he said in a low voice. They were both standing in the stone court, away from the noise of the street. 'I would not have come—only—I am going away to-morrow morning, and I wanted just to say good-bye.'

She was standing near the gate, and she put out her hand and leant against it. The moonlight threw the shadows of the iron railings just at her feet, and shone on her lovely face. 'I am glad you have come,' she said. 'If you had gone away without a word, I would have thought you were angry with me.'

'I am not angry. I have been thinking ever since that you did quite right. And, Mercy, every word you said to-day was true. I wanted to tell you, before going, how I honour and love you all the more for having the courage to do as you have done. I haven't much hope of ever winning you. The change you spoke of—well, it can't be done just to order, you know. I can't go and buy religion as I

would a suit of new clothes. But I will try to be something different from what I have been. You shall not think of me as a Fainéant.'

'Ah! forgive that word.'

'I don't need to forgive. It was true.'

'But I need not have said it,' she said, regretfully.

'Never mind, dear,' he answered. 'I forgive—if there is anything to forgive. As for forgetting—you wouldn't wish me to do that.'

Then was a minute of silence. Then he took her hand and held it in his. 'Good-bye! I know that you speak often to One whom I have forgotten. Will you say a word for me sometimes?'

'Yes,' she whispered.

He looked down at her very tenderly. How often afterwards she thought of that kind, handsome face! Then he kissed her hand and went away.

She went into the house like one in a dream; and crouching down beside her aunt, laid her head in her lap. The blind lady felt hot tears on her hands. 'What is it, my darling?' she asked.

And with sobs and tears, Mercy told her. When she had become calm again, 'This is a bit of the dark road, auntie,' she said.

'Yes, my dear one. But it will be light before the end.'

'I know—I can trust; but it was hard to let him go. There was the difficulty, too, of determining

whether it was perfectly right. Ought I not to have kept him, and tried to influence him for good?'

Miss Lester thought for a little. 'I think, my child, that you have probably done that already. How do we know but that God may bless what you have said to him? And I am not sure that getting his own way in the thing that he had set his heart upon, would have been best for him. I am thinking only of him, you know, just now.'

'Yes. Go on, please.'

'I think that a change, to be real and lasting, must spring, not from the desire to please any earthly creature, but from the growth of a new principle in his heart. He must be led to serve God, not because you wish it, but because it is right.'

Mercy drew a sigh of relief. 'Auntie, I am so thankful that you think so: I thought just that. But one gets doubtful sometimes, when one stands quite alone. And then sometimes one's heart cries out, auntie.'

'My poor child!' And again the beautiful face was hidden on those tender old hands. 'God will comfort you, darling,' whispered the old lady.

The next morning, a steamer sailed out of the bay, and carried Christian Osborne with it.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FORESHADOWINGS.

AND so summer was over at last, and the bright autumn days shortened, and winter came down upon Inverurquhart.

One morning, when Mercy went into her garden, dahlias were standing black and blighted, as if scathed by fire; and tropæolums were mere limp tangled strings, disagreeable to touch or smell. The first keen frost had come in the night, and after that there was very little more warmth in the sunshine. Mists came rolling over the sea, and east winds blew bitterly in between the Craigs, and chill rains fell. The waves no longer played with pebbles on the shore, but came dashing over the rocks with white crests, and wild, beating noise. Bright as the Inverurquhart summer was, with its northern richness of blue and purple colouring, and blazing northern sunsets, it must be confessed that those who lived there in winter had a long battle to fight against

mists, and rain, and storms of wind. And with the cold weather came a certain degree of depression to both the women whose stories I am telling. Neither of them had quite expected that she would miss the male members of the little company of four with so much acuteness. They had been quite happy and contented on that July afternoon, when Christian Osborne and Robbie M'Intosh came to Inverurquhart; and now, after four months or so of intercourse with those two men, they were left in exactly the same condition, as regards outside things, in which they had been before. Neither of them acknowledged to the other the blank sense of loss that came upon her, after Christian and Robbie were really gone. Mercy fought against it dutifully, and having plenty to do, she succeeded after a while, if not in altogether overcoming it, at least in achieving something like contentment. With Ailie, who was less frank in acknowledging to herself what it was that caused her depression, the task of subduing it was much harder. Her time of work was not yet come, she was only growing towards it; and then there is something terrible for a woman, who has a dear friend at sea, in listening to the wind at night, and the breaking of waves on the rocks, and in looking by day at the heaving, grey, winter sea. Have you ever noticed, in seafaring places, the curiously wistful, anxious look that nearly all the women have

on their faces? That look has grown there in nights of lonely listening, and days of watching; when a change of weather made their heart beat with fear, and a sudden gust of wind seemed to make it stand still with sick foreboding.

> 'Ye gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease,
> Oh, little do ye think upon the dangers of the seas.'

And ye ladies of England, whose husbands, and sons, and lovers come home to dinner at six, oh, little do you think upon the aching hearts of sailors' wives!

There was no surer proof of the nobleness of Mercy Lester's character, than her perfect patience with, and faith in Ailie Rose. A smaller kind of woman, morally speaking, would have been incapable of trusting one so thoroughly different from herself. She would have imagined that because she herself was able to go among her poorer neighbours, speaking gracious words of comfort and cheer to them, helping them morally and physically in so far as lay in her power, that therefore Ailie, who was overcome with shyness before a class of ignorant fisher children, and was stricken with dumbness whenever she entered a cottage, was neglecting her share of work. She would have pestered her into teaching Sunday classes, and going district visiting; and by giving her a false and morbid conscience, would

have bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne upon her shrinking shoulders. But Mercy at once recognised in Ailie the stamp of an altogether different nature from her own. She had perfect patience with the slow growth of her character and intellect. She believed that Ailie's work in the meantime was simply that of a flower-bud, which has just to keep still and let the winds of heaven blow on it, and God's sun shine warmly on it, and the dew and rain refresh it, and through all to let itself unfold. There must be no hasty pulling apart of the close-folded leaves, twisted and sealed so cunningly over the flower heart. I have seen buds so pulled apart by childish fingers, which did not understand how to wait, and the result was, a poor, faded, deformed thing, all crushed and spoilt, that might have been a delight of colour and perfume.

Mercy knew that Ailie was one of God's own flowers, and in his good time the blossom would open. So she wisely left her alone, except in so far as the most tender sympathy could help her. She leant down from her own serene heights of faith to listen to the doubtings, and tremblings, and aspirations of the wild young heart, which did not yet know itself. She made allowance for the seeming capriciousness of the nature which she knew to be only the panting of a soul just half awake, but

full of high thoughts and yearnings after good. She smiled a little, very tenderly, at the gloominess of Ailie's views, at her fits of hopelessness. She knew that a little gentle ridicule was good for her occasionally, and knew also when to administer it in judicious doses. It is curious that the poet-nature should be saddest when it is young. Perhaps it is the consciousness, only instinctive as yet, of the battle to be fought, and the knowing that it has all to come. For a poet is, above all things, a thinker of thoughts. And when a new thought is born, it is brought forth with throes of anguish, like a living child. When I speak of a new thought, I do not mean a thought which shall be new to all the world; for there are some thoughts which every soul must bring forth for itself, and which are as new to each one as the love that a man's first-born child brings to him. But the poet, whose thoughts are not to belong to himself alone, but to go forth and grow into the hearts of men, has to endure a large share of the sorrow of thought-bearing. Out of his own weakness and anguish, his tossings on seas of doubt, his gropings after light in the darkness, he has to bring his found treasures to lay them at the feet of the world. And, after all, how often has he to hear that in the world's estimate his jewels are only paste, and his gold tinsel!

Perhaps the most valuable lesson which Mercy

taught Ailie, was this: that no one has a right, because of certain gifts bestowed by God, however rare those gifts may be, to neglect plain duties and relations. No man or woman has a right, because of being poet or artist, to be a bad husband or wife, son or daughter, father or mother. No man has a right, whatever his gifts may be, to shrink from winning his own way in the world, and doing a man's work therein. And no woman, whatever genius may be in her, has a right to neglect those common household duties which belong to each, according to her station. Mercy succeeded in implanting in Ailie's breast a wholesome horror of ladies who devote themselves to poetry, science, or the good of mankind generally, while their husband's dinners are uneatable, and their children's clothes unmended.

So Ailie superintended Bell's doings with tolerable efficiency, and knitted her father's stockings none the worse because her thoughts were busy all the while. She was a gentle, affectionate little daughter on the whole; the outburst of indignation I have chronicled being nearly a solitary instance. Her father knew as much about the workings of his little daughter's heart and soul, as he did about the jewel caves in the depths of the sea, or any other wonderful and secret thing in nature. But he loved her in his stern, undemonstrative fashion;

and she knew his ways, and had learnt not to expect what was not in him to give.

Of the two, Mercy had the greatest number of real troubles to face that winter.

In the first place, Mrs. Lynne was angry with her, and showed that she was so by her altered manner.

'It was so foolish,' she said to her husband. 'A girl without a penny, in an out-of-the-way place like this, how can she expect to have such another chance?'

'Perhaps she doesn't expect it,' said Fred, who took things easily.

'Of course I feel it most for Christian's sake. I know she would have suited him, though I am angry with her. That affair of long ago has spoilt his life ever since. Now, this might have been the saving of him.'

'My dear,' said the laird mildly, 'I don't know that she was bound to marry him on that account. The former affair was different altogether. He was jilted, and it made him cynical and hard, and, I daresay, made him a little idle too. But a civil refusal,—well, a man may be disappointed, but he has no right to complain over-much. If the girl doesn't like him, she doesn't, and there's an end of it.'

But Mrs. Lynne, being a woman, could hardly

be expected to be just; and Mercy had cold looks and few words from her for a while.

Her second cause of trouble was, that she began to notice, what other people had been whispering for some time, that her aunt was fading. The gentle, blind lady, never very strong, lost very gradually what little strength she had. She cared less to sit in her arm-chair, and liked the sofa to be drawn near the fire, so that she might lie nearly all day. The sweet face grew thinner; and her hands, which had always been very slender, became wonderfully transparent. It was long before Mercy would allow to herself that there was anything seriously wrong; but at last, with a great pang of anguish, the truth burst upon her.

One evening, when Miss Lester had been sitting longer than usual in her chair, Mercy was helping her back to the sofa. It was only a few steps from one side of the narrow fireplace to the other, but, in taking that short journey, Miss Lester's strength gave way, and she fainted in Mercy's arms. When she recovered consciousness, she heard Mercy calling, in that sharp voice which indicates acute pain, 'Oh! auntie, speak to me again; only once more, auntie!'

The blind lady felt that her head was resting on Mercy's shoulder. The blind eyelids quivered, and she smiled faintly.

'Darling,' she said, when she could speak, 'did you think the end had come? Not yet for a little, but soon, I think. Mercy, dearest one, I am going out of the darkness soon.'

'Oh, auntie, auntie! oh, no, no,' sobbed Mercy, her strength utterly broken down for a little.

'It is true,' whispered her aunt.

Mercy laid her aunt gently back on the pillow, and sat down just where she was on the hearth-rug, and bent her head on her knees. There was a long silence; then she felt the dear hand passed over her head, with the soft touch peculiar to the blind. She lifted her face, and her aunt's fingers moved gently over it, stroking down her eyelids over her eyes, already heavy with weeping.

'I know what a sorrowful face this is, though I can't see it.'

'Auntie, it can't be. I won't believe it.'

'Dear, I have known it a good while now. And I asked Dr. Fletcher. He knows.'

Mercy moaned, and then came an exceeding bitter cry, 'How can you go, and leave me quite alone!'

'My poor child! I know it is hard. It was the hardest part of it for me at first. Somehow, now, the thought of everything else is swallowed up in the one overpowering thought—I am going to see Christ!'

Mercy looked at her. There was a very solemn look on the blind woman's face. It was as if already those darkened eyes saw faint glimmerings of light in the distance, and as if the whole soul yearned to go towards it.

When Mercy spoke next she was calm. 'I am selfish, dearest auntie; I know what it must be to you to feel heaven so near. I—I won't grumble any more. I can't promise not to grieve, you know;' her voice broke again, and she laid her cheek on the pillow, pressed close to her aunt's.

'I remember,' said Miss Lester, after a while, 'that when I was a girl I went up to London. It was night when we got near it, and I can see yet the lights of London in the distance, how they shone through the darkness, always growing larger and brighter as we got nearer. That is how heaven looks to me now, darling. And the lights are, oh! so beautiful.'

Mercy was very still for a long time. The room grew dark, except for the red fire glow that shone on her golden hair. A melancholy wind blew in gusts round the little old house, and the branches of an apple-tree tapped against the window. It was one of those times when even the bravest hearts sink down trembling, with a heavy hopeless weight on them, which feels as if nothing could raise it. Mercy's felt like lead. She felt as if her aunt were

going away into a warm lighted house, leaving her outside in the cold and darkness. She could only keep saying little gasping prayers, 'God help me; O God, help me to bear it!' in her misery. I think the Father's heart hears such prayers as these.

'I won't leave you again, auntie,' she said, after she had helped Miss Lester to undress, and was sitting by the bed, leaning her head against the pillow. 'I will speak to Mrs. Lynne to-morrow. I must have every minute with you now.'

'Your quarter will be out in a week, dear. They will pay you for it all, and I should like you to work out your engagement honestly,' answered her aunt.

And so, with a heavy heart, Mercy walked over the miry roads, through cold wind and beating rains, which were hardly felt, while she was thinking of pain so much worse to bear.

It was the last day of that week, and she was sitting in the schoolroom with Lily and Fan. She had been trying all day to hear their lessons just as usual, trying very hard not to look forward to what must come before she should be there again. For Mrs. Lynne, ashamed of her injustice, had softened towards Mercy when she had been told of Miss Lester's illness. 'You will come back, dear,' she had urged. And Mercy had given a promise as far as was possible in the circumstances.

It was a pleasant little parlour, made cosy with

warm red curtains and carpet, and full of cheerful evidences of the presence of childhood. Lily and Fan's baby-house faced the book-case where their schoolbooks were kept; and near the piano, where Lily was playing one of Cramer's lessons, lay her pet terrier, watching her through his shaggy hair, and thinking of a race in the corridor. Lessons were by no means a burden to the little Lynnes. 'Make my girls graceful and modest; teach them to speak the truth, and be kind to every one,' the squire sometimes said. 'But don't stuff their brains too full of bits of knowledge, nor spoil their constitutions by keeping them sitting at lessons when they ought to be running about.' So Mercy's office had been a peculiarly easy and pleasant one.

She was sitting near the fire to-day, listening mechanically to Lily's practising, so as to be able to correct a wrong note now and then, and at the same time looking over Fan's shoulder at the little hand that was slowly writing a copy in large text, when Mrs. Lynne came into the room. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining through indignant tears. Mercy knew before she spoke that something had gone wrong.

'Will you read this, Miss Lester?' she said, in an angry, excited tone. 'Perhaps you may begin to doubt the perfect wisdom of all your actions.'

It was Christian Osborne's handwriting. Mercy

knew it immediately, and her heart stood still with terror for a minute. She sat down without speaking, and held out her hand for the letter.

'MY DEAREST LOO,—I am afraid you may be vexed about what I am going to do; but I think it is the best thing in the circumstances—at least it doesn't occur to me that I can do anything else, so I may as well do this. The man who went out to the Crimea, as correspondent to the *Friday Fault-finder*, has come home. He had cholera, and couldn't stand it any longer. They have offered to send me in his place, and I am going. Perhaps a stray Russian bullet may put an end to a life that has been of very little use to anybody.

'Tell a friend of mine that I am trying at least not to be altogether a Fainéant. Perhaps this is a blundering way of going to work; but it is better than standing doing nothing, while our brave fellows are dying out there.

'I am to start immediately; so, before you get this, I'll be on my way.

'Kiss the chicks for me. Love to Fred.—Your loving brother, CHRISTIAN OSBORNE.'

When Mercy read this letter, she sat absolutely still. Mrs. Lynne was standing opposite her on the rug, watching her with angry, jealous eyes. 'I hope you are satisfied with your work?' she asked fiercely.

Mercy was silent; she only raised her eyes, full of a mute anguish, to the unrelenting, reproachful face.

'He is my only brother; it is no wonder I am angry to see him driven away so. ' Driven away into danger, perhaps to death. Oh Christian!'

The children came to her, frightened by seeing her cry.

'I think I will go,' said Mercy with quivering lips. 'It is no use, my trying to defend myself while you are so angry. Some day you will feel you have been unjust.'

And she went out into the grey, rainy afternoon. The rain beat in her face, and the wind blew against her, but she never felt them. She saw nothing—the wild sea nor stormy sky; she could not even think yet of what had happened. Her aunt was on the sofa in the sitting-room, where the fire was blazing brightly, making little reflections of itself in all the old cups and bowls on the cabinet. She heard Mercy's step coming upstairs, and then she came into the room, all wet as she was, and cowered down beside the fire, shivering.

'What is it, my darling?'

'Christian Osborne has gone out to the Crimea, auntie.' Her voice sounded strangely calm, but the ear of the blind lady detected the strain in it. She raised herself, and held out her hands.

'Come to me, and tell me about it.'

They were just the words that Mercy had heard spoken in those gentle tones, in all her childish troubles; they touched the right fibre now, and she laid her head down on her aunt's lap and cried.

'Tell me how he has gone, dear. Is it to fight?'

'No. It is as correspondent to a paper. Auntie, though I do this, I am not sorry. He was right to go, if he thought he could do the work well; and perhaps he may help some of the poor fellows out there who are suffering. And he says it was better than doing nothing; I know it is.'

'Will he be in any danger?'

'I don't know exactly. He says the man whose place he goes to fill had cholera. I suppose no one is free from the risk of that.' Her voice faltered a good deal, and Miss Lester felt some warm tears on her hands.

'But, auntie, perhaps when he sees death so near, he may begin to understand better that life is meant for something besides pleasure. Oh, auntie, perhaps God is leading him out there.'

'Nay, my child, *surely* God is leading him,' said Miss Lester.

You will perceive that Mercy's heart had some cause to be heavy during those stormy winter months at Inverurquhart.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### GEORGE DESMOND.

IT was a day in December, very cold, very nasty, with biting, stinging rain above, and an enormous amount of sticky, slushy mud below, through which slush Christian Osborne's servant had just succeeded in wading. He had been catering for dinner, and had succeeded in bringing back, first, a ham; second, some very mouldy biscuits; and third, a barrel of butter, which, from its condition, was condemned to stand in the farthest corner of his tent. Mr. Osborne himself was sitting on his bed, with his writing-case on his knees, and was just finishing his letter to the *Friday Faultfinder*. He had to tell of several skirmishes, of some casualties, of misery, cold, dirt, starvation, and cholera. He abused everybody he could think of in that letter, asking loudly why the British troops were so ill-clothed, so miserably fed, while stores lay rotting on the wharves at Balaclava. Do

we not all remember reading such letters, and how a great shudder of horror thrilled through all Britain at the hearing of those things; and how every one kept asking what Government could possibly be about, and no one ever got any answer?

As Mr. Osborne was not under the paternal care of red-tapism and the Circumlocution Office, his tent was furnished with rather more comfort than those of the officers of the invincible British army. He had an iron camp bedstead, a mattress, and plenty of blankets, which latter, however, were being slowly reduced, as he felt compelled, out of sheer humanity, to give one away occasionally to a sick friend. He had several articles of camp furniture besides; and above all, he had a small cooking-stove, which made his tent an extremely popular rendezvous. Just now he looked up every now and then to give an amused glance at a young officer, who was sitting on a stool by the stove, eating slices of ham and fried biscuit out of a frying-pan. He had been one of the greatest dandies in his corps, and was now very ragged, rather dirty (water was too precious to wash with), and was eating his ham as if he were starving. So he might, poor fellow; he had just come in, cold, wet, and hungry, from the trenches. And yet his worn face looked as far as possible from being cast down, his eyes looked out from it bright and indomitable, and he kept laugh-

ing and throwing light jests to Christian, as if he had never known fatigue or cold. How they endured and fought, those dandies!

Christian folded up his letter.

'Have you finished?' asked the lieutenant.

'Yes. Have you?'

He put down his frying-pan empty, with a sigh. 'Yes; at least the ham is. I am going to sleep now.' And then he rose and stretched himself, yawning tremendously.

'Lie down here, then,' said Christian. 'I know what you have in your tent to lie down on.'

'Thank you. You are awfully kind.' He rolled himself on the bed, and in two seconds was sound asleep. Christian stood beside him for a minute, looking down rather sadly on that face, so young, so terribly worn. The firm-set lines of stern resolve came out more plainly in sleep; when he was awake, the careless ready smile hid them a little.

'Poor Harry!' thought Christian. 'I wonder what his mother would say if she saw him now. It's a blessing the women at home can't possibly realize what the fellows here go through.'

He went to the entrance of the tent and looked out. It stood on a rising ground, and straight before him he could see first the broken, rough ground between him and Sebastopol, then the white walls of the town, and then the sea beyond. Every now and

then the deep voices of the guns came booming across; he heard some firing from the French camp, and a band playing, and the voices of a working-party going towards the trenches. The rain had stopped, a watery gleam of sunshine shone down on the camp, and he thought he would go out. Through the slush he waded, past a dead horse which smelt intolerably, till he was fairly outside the camp; and then he found himself at the foot of one of those steep ravines which intersected the hills. He begun ascending it, not caring particularly where he was going, or asking himself why he went in that direction more than any other. He was tired of sitting still, he had been writing all morning, and he wanted some exercise. That was the only definite thought present to him as he went stumbling over the rough stones, his greatcoat buttoned up to his chin to keep out the cold. Some one has said that we never go to meet, of set purpose, the important things of life; we turn suddenly round a corner and come upon them all at once. Mr. Osborne was turning one of his corners just then, without in the least knowing it. It was a literal corner in his case; he went round a ledge, and suddenly came upon what was going on at the other side. About twenty soldiers were seated in a sort of recess, where they were sheltered in some degree from the bitter wind. A young man was standing in the middle of them

reading a hymn, and just as Christian turned the corner they began to sing. He had heard the words somewhere before—

> 'Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to thy bosom fly.'

The sudden tears rose to his eyes as he listened; there was something so inexpressibly touching in the sound of those old familiar words, sung by that handful of men who were so far from home, who might likely never see it again, and who yet felt another home so near. The voices blended not inharmoniously, led by one that was both strong and sweet. Christian stood still, with his hat off, while the young man prayed, a short prayer, almost childlike in its simplicity. When it was over the young man looked up, and saw the stranger standing with bent, uncovered head.

'Won't you come in and sit down?' he said, looking at him with a very bright, gentle smile.

Christian bowed and went forward. Then the simple services went on: a few verses from one of the Gospels—Christian remembered afterwards that it was the story of the thief on the cross,—and then a few very simple, earnest words. He knew at once that the man who spoke them was not particularly clever, and he had been used to rate cleverness very highly; yet they impressed him strongly, and he

saw by the rough, worn faces of the soldiers, so anxiously turned towards the speaker, that they were devouring every syllable, as a starving man devours bread. They were told that Jesus was near them then, out there in the cold and wet; that his heart was warm and loving, his arms ready to receive them. They were reminded that they might be very near death, and told that they would be all the braver soldiers if they knew that the enemy could only send them straight home. Then they were besought to tell others the message that Jesus could save; and that was nearly all. Christian found himself wondering what there was in the words to move rough men so: he knew they were moved, for he saw the tears rolling down their cheeks, and heard some half-stifled sobs, and long-drawn breaths. But he looked chiefly at the preacher. He was a very young man, hardly more than a boy, but his frame was largely built, and well developed. And his head was one of the most beautiful that Christian had ever seen. He had light brown hair, tinged with gold which curled in soft rings over his smooth brow; large, lustrous, blue eyes, that made Christian think of Mercy's, for they had the same stedfast, far-seeing look. His cheeks were smooth and round like a girl's, and he had an exquisitely sweet mouth. There was a wonderfully spiritual expression in the whole head, it might have been that of an ideal

St. John. Christian kept looking at him, feeling strangely fascinated by that rare beauty: all beautiful things had a fascination for him.

The services were over, and the men went slowly away, in groups of two or three, down the rough ravine. Christian lingered, and the preacher came up to him.

'I am very glad to see you at our meeting,' he said, with a bright, gentle smile.

'Thank you,' said Christian, and then paused, embarrassed for a moment. They turned together to walk towards the camp. 'But I don't want to sail under false colours; I only came by accident. You must not think—I am not one of those who care for such things.'

'I am very sorry for that,' said the other; and the bright blue eyes looked really sorrowful as they met Christian's.

'Why should you be sorry? I can be nothing to you.' The words came abruptly, as if something compelled him to speak.

'You are mistaken,' answered the other. He had put his arm within Christian's, and they were walking slowly on together. 'Don't you know that my belief implies a universal brotherhood?' He smiled again that wonderfully bright, sweet smile; and Christian looked at him again, and thought he was very beautiful.

There seemed to be a curious sort of mutual at-

traction between those two. I can give no other reason for the sudden growth of a friendship which, while it lasted, was one of the strongest and deepest of Christian Osborne's life, except the beautiful old Scripture reason, 'And it came to pass, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.'

'I suppose I had better introduce myself,' he said, 'as there's nobody else to do it. My name is George Desmond, and I am captain in the —th.'

'So I was beginning to suppose. I have heard of you already, though I have not been long out. Mine is Christian Osborne, and I have come in place of Mr. Wood, whom perhaps you knew.'

'Yes. I saw him while he had cholera. He was very ill, poor fellow.'

'Is it that universal brotherhood you spoke of,' said Christian, hesitating a little, 'that makes you come out in the cold to hold those meetings?'

'Yes; certainly.'

'And—excuse me—but do you really think it does any good?'

'If I did not think so,' answered Captain Desmond, 'I should feel that the light had been taken out of my life. Can there be any higher good, while things visible are so wretched for those poor fellows, than the being told of the glory of things invisible?'

Christian was startled. He remembered Mercy's sermon; and it seemed strange to him that those two, who had never heard of each other, should yet be united by a mystic tie, which led them to speak the same language—a language to him almost incomprehensible.

'Things invisible,' he repeated; 'where are they? I have heard others speak of them, as if they were even now present to them. Does it need a second sight to see those things? for I am blind to them.'

'Do you believe in them?'

'Believe!' he repeated slowly. 'Yes, I suppose I believe, in a fashion. I have never been what is called a sceptic; I have simply been thinking so much of other things that those unseen things have been forgotten.'

'I understand,' said the other sadly. 'Your Friend died for you, and you forgot Him.'

Christian was silent.

'Tell me,' went on Captain Desmond, 'have you ever desired to receive the anointing that Jesus can give to the eyes? You remember how they used to bring blind people to Him, and how He used to touch their eyes, and the sight came to them. It is just so with us about that other spiritual sight. We are blind to unseen things until we go to Jesus; then He touches our eyes, and we see clearly.'

'I have not desired it,' answered Christian; 'not

desired that touch for its own sake. Only lately I have begun to be aware that a certain part of my nature is blind, that I cannot see the unseen yet.'

'And would you not like to see it?'

Christian held down his head without speaking. 'You must wonder,' he said at last, 'that I do not.'

'No, I don't wonder, I only grieve. Ever since He, the Light, came to the darkness, and the darkness comprehended Him not, men have loved darkness rather than light.'

'There,' said Christian, smiling rather sadly, 'you see I don't even comprehend the language that you of the invisible brotherhood speak. You have a sort of free-masonry among yourselves, and understand one another. This is my tent; won't you come in?'

'Not now. I am obliged to go further. I'll see you again soon, I hope.' And he went away through the mud, and soaking, drizzling rain.

The twilight was falling cheerless and cold. From the batteries were breaking flashes of brilliant light, as a gun was fired, or a shell flew like a fiery comet through the air, carrying death in its train. And as Christian turned into his tent, where Harry Moore still slept on the bed, he felt that in all that great army there was not a nobler, purer, braver heart than George Desmond's.

## CHAPTER XX.

### 'A NOBLE LIFE.'

FOR a man like Christian Osborne, the most convincing testimony that could be borne to the truth was the testimony of a life. Indeed I think that, in many cases, arguments brought to bear upon the reason are not of much use to the soul. At least it seems to me that, in dealing with the invisible things of one's own experience, and one's relations to God, argument, or anything that appeals purely to the reason, takes a subordinate place. After the eyes of the inner consciousness have been opened, one can see the beauty of the profound arguments of the Apostle Paul, but one can scarcely begin with them. A reasonable, seeing soul, can see, among other things, that the whole scheme of salvation is based upon axiomatic truth, and that its conclusions are according to the most strictly logical deductions. But to the man whose spiritual eyes are still blind, it

is impossible to prove by argument that the cross is the wisdom of God. It is impossible to show to him, by force of logic, the awful wisdom, the terrible justice, the utter righteousness of the cross of Christ.

And so, before those arguments so keen and subtle, those trains of thought so sustained, those reasonings so exalted of the apostle, there has been given to us a simple history, the record of a pure, noble, gracious life, and of a self-renouncing death. And as we read how He walked and spoke, how He endured, how He forgave, how He healed and fed the multitude, and preached the gospel to the poor, we feel that the most powerful influence that can possibly be brought to bear upon our souls, is the influence that still drops from those outspread, tender hands, felt through the intervening mists of eighteen centuries.

If George Desmond had begun to argue with Mr. Osborne, he would inevitably have been beaten as far as the mere argument went, seeing that the victory in such cases lies not with him who has truth on his side, but only with him who is the cleverer of the two. Fortunately he never attempted it, for such a victory might have cost Christian's spiritual life dear. But during those months of privation, he lived before him a true, pure, beautiful, christian life. Christian watched

him very closely, and he saw that among the officers there was none more thoroughly efficient, none whose duties were more ably performed, whose men were more conscientiously cared for, whose personal courage was more undoubted. He saw that, in the face of trials the hardest to bear, he kept his Christian profession untarnished, shrinking neither from the taunt of an enemy nor the light jest of a friend. He saw him walking faithfully in the footsteps of his Master, spending his time and his strength in carrying words of hope to the sick and dying; he saw him always ready to sacrifice his own comfort for the good of others. And the watching of such a life, lived out before him in the middle of all the cold, and dirt, and misery, and danger of those months, had more effect upon Christian than any words could have had. If he had ever allowed a doubt of the truth of the religion of Christ to cross his mind, the watching of the beautiful fruit that it bore in George Desmond's life, would have gone far to dissipate it.

There must have been a good deal of a dreadful kind of monotony about those winter months; a monotony of rain and mud, frost, snow, awful cold, sickness and death, going on from day to day, to the accompaniment of the booming guns. Christian had never felt so helpless in his life as he did now, just when the desire to be helpful was strug-

gling to life in him. He ground his teeth at his own impotence, when he saw pain that it was impossible for him to relieve. And then there came upon him a strong conviction of the treasure which George Desmond carried about with him. It seemed to Christian like a talisman; he had nothing else to give very often; and yet, in some low-spoken words, he seemed to convey his talisman to poor suffering creatures, and pale, haggard faces were lighted up with hope, and dim eyes brightened.

It was in the hospital tent, one day, that this conviction flashed most strongly upon him. He had gone in, wanting to gather materials for a report upon its condition, to be sent home in his next letter. What he saw was not calculated to cheer him much. He thought it must be a terrible thing to die on the floor of that wretched place, so far from all the tenderness of home, without the glory and excitement of battle. As he looked round on the faces so worn by sickness and privation, such a weight pressed on his heart, that, strong man as he was, he nearly broke down and cried. That feeling of utter helplessness was overpowering him: those poor fellows needed the seen things, sure enough—blankets, and nourishing food, and tendance—and he had none to give them. And then, by one of the wretched beds, he found George Desmond talking

to a man who was evidently dying, and who listened with a smile on his face. It was inexplicable to Christian that beaming look of hope on the dying face, that strange light in the dying eyes, when everything to him seemed so utterly hopeless. He stood still and watched, while Captain Desmond went from one sick man to another, to each speaking those gentle words of faith and consolation, and leaving the same gleam of hope behind him. He had no more seen things to give them than Christian had; but that invisible talisman which he carried was wonderful in its effects.

Christian went away without speaking to him at the time, with a curious mixture of envy and admiration in his heart.

He met him again that night. As he was strolling beyond the camp, he came upon a bivouac fire, and saw George Desmond sitting beside it, reading by its red light. It was a curious scene: a heavy snow-storm had fallen, and the night was now still and frosty; the sky overhead was studded with stars, that shone coldly down on the wide, white, undulating country, and the great, solemn, snow-robed mountains beyond; the bivouac fires gleamed redly here and there, and every now and then the guns flashed out in the distance; and, in the middle of it all, Captain Desmond's full-toned voice was saying, 'Though I walk through the valley of

the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me.'

Christian sat down beside him, and listened silently till the psalm was finished.

'George,' he said, when it was done, and the silence had been broken only by the booming guns for a little, 'do you believe in goodness and mercy following you here?'

'Yes; most emphatically.'

'Do you believe in goodness and mercy being shown to that poor fellow that I saw you talking to to-day, while he lay dying on the floor of that wretched hospital?'

'Were you there? I didn't see you. That man is dead now. He died saying, "Lord Jesus, take me." And I believe Jesus did take him. Christian, the goodness and mercy are often felt where they are not seen. Think what it must be to go straight up out of that dreary tent to the white robes and glorious music of heaven.'

Christian didn't answer; he wanted George to go on speaking. And I may say here, that though these two had been a great deal together by this time, Captain Desmond was too wise to be perpetually thrusting his religious convictions on Christian. He saw that the blind soul was groping after truth, and in as far as he could he helped it; but he knew that light must come straight from God.

Any one who saw his life must see that it was a life lived for Christ; but he seldom spoke to Christian of his inner experience, unless Christian himself led the way to it.

'I have felt,' he said, 'more of God's goodness and mercy since coming here than I ever did before. He is very good to his children, you see; when He takes away outside things from them, He often gives them such closeness to himself, such a peace and gladness of soul, that they feel just warm in his smile.'

'I wish I could see; I wish I could understand,' said Christian, with a sudden cry, as if through the darkness he had stretched out his hands, wanting to clasp some other hand.

Captain Desmond's eyes glistened, and his voice trembled as he said, 'My dear old fellow, I never heard you say that before. You will see, you will understand, if you really want to. I am so glad you have got that length.'

'I don't know,' said Christian sadly. 'I hear you talk, and I seem to wish for light, but somehow my heart feels as hard as a stone.'

'Jesus can soften it,' answered the other, simply. 'I pray very often that He will.'

'You pray for me!' said Christian, opening his eyes wide.

'Of course. Could you think that I didn't?'

'I don't know. It's a new idea to me, and very surprising.' He stared into the fire without speaking, and then his lips quivered into a smile.

'What is it?' asked George, who was watching him.

'I am glad you do that. I was wondering if any one else did — if *she* does,' he went on, speaking almost in a whisper. 'And if prayer is any use, surely there is some hope for me. I don't know. I'm in the dark still. How those guns flash! Look at that shell; what a fiery tail it leaves behind it! They are grand fireworks those, if one didn't know what mischief they did.'

And then he sat far on in the night, watching Captain Desmond, who had lain down on a bed of leaves with a stone for his pillow. 'I wonder if he sees angels in his sleep,' he thought, as he watched the calm, beautiful face. 'Jacob did, when he lay with his head on such a pillow as that, long ago. Is that a type of what George was saying about the unseen things coming nearest when outside things are wanting? I daresay there are many heads laid on down pillows to-night that the angel-dreams don't come to.'

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WATCH POINT.

MEANWHILE at Inverurquhart the new year had come in stormy and cold, with wild winds, and great waves, that beat on the rocks as if an angry heart were in them. The month of January was an exceptionally stormy one, even out on the stormy North Sea; and in the middle of January, Robbie M'Intosh was to be home. Ailie found herself counting the weeks and days as they slipped past; and many an hour she sat in her lonely little parlour, with the sound of the waves in her ears, and perplexed musings in her heart. For, now that the time of Robbie's return was nearing, her doubts of herself, of her love for him, of the possibility of happiness in a life with him, began to come back to her. It was characteristic of Ailie's order of mind that she should be full of doubts and self-questionings about a matter of this kind. It seemed to her, sometimes, as if there must be two

opposing sentiments at work within her, which kept arguing with each other. The one missed Robbie sorely, and was conscious of a keen longing to have him safe back again; it also asserted the need of love, of protection, of sympathy, which exists in the woman-nature. The other shrunk from giving to Robbie quite the place that he wanted: it was willing enough to accept him as the true friend, the pleasant companion; but was he, it asked, just the kind of man fitted to be Ailie's husband? Could the wants of her nature all be satisfied in him? Was he capable of understanding those vague aspirations, those unuttered doubts, and fears, and hopes of hers, and of giving sympathy and love through all? You see she was half a child yet, and did not know that there are parts of one's nature which must be always lonely. She did not know that the friend we trust, the husband on whose breast we lean, can at best only guess at half the things that are in our heart. Only God knows them. And as we grow older and wiser, we learn to content ourselves with the simple truth and heartfelt devotion of a love which cannot always understand, and, thanking God for the deep human love, turn from it often to the all-comprehending, divine sympathy.

Mercy was watching by her aunt's sofa, seeing the life she loved wane from day to day; and Ailie saw

less of her than usual. She went to sit with her sometimes; but as Miss Lester grew weaker, she liked best to have only Mercy with her, so that the visits of friends had to be short ones. But one day, when the time for Robbie's home-coming was very near, so near that at any hour the boat that would bring him might be expected to be seen tacking between the Craigs, Ailie was delighted to catch sight of Mercy's tall figure stooping to open the garden gate. She herself had been going out, and she ran to meet her friend at the door.

'The sight of you is like spring coming,' she said, kissing her, and drawing her into the parlour. 'How is Miss Lester?'

'Just about the same,' said Mercy, sighing. 'I daresay I don't notice the difference in her from day to day so much as those who see her less constantly. She insisted on my coming out to-day for a little, and of course I came straight here. Childie, you are looking pale and thin; what ails you?'

Ailie flushed, and turned away her face. She had knelt down before Mercy on the hearth-rug, and had been looking up into her face, with her brown eyes full of the gladness of seeing her. Now the gladness died out of them, and a shadow fell instead. 'I don't know,' she answered slowly, 'unless it be the waiting, and listening to the sea. There have been such storms, you know. You don't hear them

in the town as we do here. Some nights the wind has moaned so round the house, like a living creature. And the waves they roar so. And then—I've wanted to talk to you so much.'

Mercy smiled down on her, with that clear, gracious smile of hers, which came all the more beautifully because she herself had been through seas of trouble since she had last talked much with Ailie. 'Are there any more tangled skeins to wind?' she asked.

'Oh! such tangled ones,' said Ailie, half laughing. 'But I won't let you stay here to wind them. I was going out too; see, I have on my things. I took a restless fit, and the sun was shining, so I meant to go up to the Point. Will you come?'

'It will blow at the Point to-day,' answered Mercy doubtfully. 'It is quieter inside the Craigs; but out there—don't you see how the waves are whitened?'

'I've been watching them all day. Never mind the wind, it is splendid on one's face. We can keep our feet against it, and I want to look out across.' She jumped up, and lifting her hat from the table, where it had been lying, tied it on determinedly.

Mercy rose too, though more slowly. 'I don't know about the wisdom of it,' she said. 'But we'll go, if you want to so much.'

The walk from Mr. Rose's house to the Watch Point has a greater variety of beauty in it than any

other two miles that I know. Mercy and Ailie went along the road, first past Robbie's cottage, till they reached the turn which led up the hill past Inverurquhart House. So far they were on the high road, shadowed as they went up the hill by bare outstretching branches of trees, through which the wind sighed drearily. But after they had passed the house, they turned to the left, and going through a gate, got on to a rough, grass-grown road that led towards the point of the South Craig. For a considerable distance this road led through woods, where the bare branches of forest trees gradually gave place to the sombre green of the pines. And a pine forest, always a place most solemnly beautiful, has an especial weird beauty when it is situated on the side of a hill close beside the sea. The tall bare stems rose like pillars, supporting the outspreading dark-green roof above; and through those vistas of straight columns they looked out on the sea, grey and flecked with white. Then they left the pines behind them, and were out on the bleak hillside, the path keeping close to the edge of the cliffs that rose from the shore below. Here and there a great solitary pine would lift its stately head to the wintry sky; the hillside was clad with masses of brown, withered bracken, which gave a warmer tint to the otherwise cold landscape. Always higher and higher they went, the wind not troubling them

much, so long as they kept on the inner side of the Craig. As they went on, the view out to the open sea beyond the Craigs grew wider and wider, till at last, as they reached the Watch Point, the whole wide waste of water stretched before them. Away to the horizon, where grey sea met grey sky, so that their place of meeting was scarcely discernible, stretched the wild moaning, heaving sea—about the most utterly desolate scene that one could well look upon on this January day, with the wintry sun shining feebly down on it. The Watch Point was just the elbow of the Craig, and standing on it, one saw both the calmer water of Inverurquhart Bay, and the wilder sea without. The wall of rock beneath them went sheer down for three hundred feet, its base fretted by waves that dashed themselves against it, and fell back with a sigh, and gathered themselves up, and rolled on with a noise like the tramp of an army, and broke and scattered again in spray. Mercy and Ailie had feet accustomed to hills, and heads accustomed to look down from heights without giddiness, or they could hardly have stood there so long in the fierce wind that met and fought with them, as soon as they turned the corner of the Craig. Sea-gulls floated in the wide space between them and the water, catching the sunshine on their white breasts and grey wings; and it seemed sometimes as if the wind caught them, and drifted

them helplessly hither and thither in mid-air. Ailie stood gazing at the stormy horizon, with troubled, wistful eyes. It always roused a strong tide of feeling within her the sight of that lonely sea—lonelier than ever to-day, for not a single sail broke its restless monotony. All the wild blood of her seafaring ancestors stirred within her; it was as if her soul yearned towards the sea, as to a living, comprehending friend. And yet she distrusted it, the cruel, treacherous thing, as sailors do, who love it as the untameable, beautiful creature that some day they know will turn and devour them.

And just now she was thinking of Robbie. Mercy guessed that when she turned from her long look at the sea, and saw her gazing at it.

'He will be home soon now,' she said, gently.

'Yes.' A long-drawn sigh, and then, 'And do you know, I don't quite know whether I want him back or not.'

'Not yet? I thought—I had hoped that you were beginning to understand your own heart better, Ailie.'

'I thought so for a little. I think, if I were sure he would be content with only as much as I want to give, I would be glad to have him back. I do miss him.' And sudden tears rose to her eyes, making the wintry sea all dim and blurred to her for a minute.

'We must go home now,' said Mercy. 'We can't talk here in this wind. It will be behind us going back.'

They turned away from the Point, Ailie giving a long, lingering look at the horizon, and went down the path again.

'Tell me, darling,' said Mercy, 'how much do you feel disposed to give him?'

'I should like to have him for my friend, just as he has been ever since I can remember. I think that, if he were my brother, I would love him dearly. I do love him, after a fashion. He is nice and big, you know, and takes care of one. But one wants something else in a husband.'

'What, darling? I want you to tell me as much as possible of what is in your heart. It does one such good just to speak sometimes.'

'Yes, I know. I have wanted you, Mercy. But, you see, I'm not sure that I quite know myself what I want. I don't think I want to marry any one just yet.'

'Well, he is very patient; he would wait.'

'Yes, I know. And that time when he spoke to me, he said he only wanted to be my friend. But I feel it can't go on so. I can't be to him just as I was before; I must be either more or less. And I don't want to be less, and I can't make up my mind to be more. I do not know how much he has in

him of what I want. I am not sure whether he would even understand about some of the things that I love most. And I don't know whether a true, generous heart like his is not worth more than the kind of sympathy I mean.'

'I think it is,' said Mercy. 'But then I am older than you; people don't come to understand that till they are past their first youth, I think, which seems almost a pity; a woman has so often to decide on what is to influence her whole life while she is still incapable of making a wise choice. Of course it must be right; God has made it so, and there must be some wise meaning in it. But I am sure, Ailie, that the sort of love that Robbie has for you is a very rare thing in the world. And it is so precious, I can hardly bear to think of its being wasted.'

'Neither can I,' acknowledged Ailie. Then she burst out, 'But, Mercy, there is a thread of meanness in my tangled skein. I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself; but—sometimes I do remember that he is only a common man, that to marry him will be a sinking from even the small amount of position I have. I am very much ashamed of myself,' she repeated, hanging down her head.

'It was good of you to tell me that,' said Mercy. 'And I don't think you need let it trouble you. I think Robbie will win his own way in the world, and

win your father's consent too, which, I daresay, will be difficult at first. If he were a man of the common stamp, a man brought up, as he has been, without education, or much chance of refinement, that itself would be a barrier between you. But you know as well as I do that Robbie is no common man. Only it helps one sometimes to know that another's judgment is like one's own. I have seen a great many fine gentlemen, Ailie darling, when I was a fine lady, long ago, but I never saw a truer, more courteous gentleman than Robbie.'

Ailie's eyes brightened. 'Thank you; I have often noticed that, and wondered at it. And I think that the kind of gentlemanhood that he has, which comes not from outward polish, but out of a kind, brave, gentle heart, is the best in the world.'

Mercy smiled a little. She thought, 'She doesn't know how much she cares for him;' but she wisely kept silence.

They went down the path more quickly than they had climbed it, and soon they were again in the shelter of the wood, where the wind only moaned among the tops of the pines, while below it was still. Here and there a ray of the cold sunshine pierced through the gloom, and fell on the earth covered by the brown needles of the firs, with something of the same effect that the light has when it shines on the floor of a church, through a dimly-painted window.

'This place always makes me feel as if I were in church,' said Ailie, looking down one of the long aisles that stretched away till they were lost in dimness. 'There is one thing I feel sure of, Mercy. Robbie would be a good safe guide in all that belongs to religion. He loves God. And I need a guide of that sort, I am so weak.'

'We are all weak, darling, though some are stronger than others. I think it depends upon how much we are able to lean upon God. And Robbie has that strength, I know. But, Ailie, I wish you could gain more of it for yourself. You seem to me sometimes like a child who, though he has a very tender, loving father, keeps shrinking away from him, and stays out in the dark, when he might be living in the same room, and seeing his father's smile all the time.'

Ailie was silent for a little, and when she spoke her voice was low and troubled. 'But, Mercy, I often doubt whether I am really his child at all—whether the darkness outside is not the right place for me—whether I have any right to go into the Father's room, and keep beside Him. You know, people—that is, people like my father and Mr. Cameron—talk a great deal about conversion. Now, I don't remember ever having passed through the sort of crisis that it seems to imply.'

'Conversion, that means turning. I think that it

can't matter whether or no you remember a time when you were going one way, and you suddenly turned round and began to go another. The great thing is to know which way your face is turned. How is your face turned, Ailie?'

A sudden flash of light came into Ailie's face. A new idea was presented to her, and her whole nature rose up to grasp it. 'How is my face turned?' she repeated slowly, and then was silent, pondering the question.

The effect on a mind like Ailie's of the religion of fear, which was the religion of the class among which she had been living all her life, was to make her excessively timid and distrustful, not only of herself, but of God's love. She had never fully realized his supreme tenderness, and that his hand was stretched out to help her, and his heart open to her. She was accustomed to believe that before being worthy to grasp that Hand, and enter into that Heart, she must pass through a crisis of mental anguish, through which it was possible she might struggle and reach the other side, all worn and buffeted, and wherein it was also possible she might sink, and perish miserably. If Mercy, with her clear, strong faith, and wide, far-seeing views of God's love, had not been near to help her, Ailie might have been always one of those children of the Father, whom their own fears keep outside the

mansion of his love, in a place where, if it is not altogether dark, there is but a grey twilight, with only an occasional gleam of light seen through the open door of the house, where those who have trusted enough to the Father are in the midst of light, and music, and dancing. And, strangely enough, it is often those who have wandered far away who feel the Father's arms about their necks, and his kiss of welcome upon their lips, and who ever after live in his mansion. There are elder brothers who would never dream of reproaching Him for taking the prodigals so close to himself, but who only creep to the outside of the door, and listen with yearning hearts to the jubilee in which they dare not join, and who are slow to believe his words, 'Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.'

'Which way is my face turned?' repeated Ailie again; and then a smile gleamed over her face and transfigured it. 'Mercy, I never thought of that before. I think—I hardly dare believe it,—but I think that my face is turned towards God. I know that I'm not worthy, but I would fain struggle along the road nearer to Him. I feel that my back is turned on sin, and whatever He hates. And whatever work He allows me to do in the world, shall be done for Him, and against evil. I am very weak; perhaps no one will ever hear my voice; but whether

or no, it shall be raised only in the cause of truth, and righteousness, and purity. Mercy,' she went on, breaking into sudden tears, 'I love Christ so. Even though I hardly dare believe that I am his, I love Him. And I know I'll keep loving Him, even though it must be far off.'

Mercy's eyes were full too. She only said, 'Ailie, it won't be far off. I believe you are one of the lambs He carries in his bosom. He has been carrying you a long while, and you didn't know it.'

Then they were both silent; but the new light shone on Ailie's face.

After leaving the wood, and getting out to the high road again, they had to pass a curious little churchyard. It was one of the loneliest, quaintest burying-grounds I have ever seen. It occupied the top of a wooded knoll, which rose above the sea, and in it there was always the murmur of waving branches, and the sound of many waters. Of all places that I have known, it was the place where the dead seemed to lie most peacefully, with that perpetual lullaby of woods and waves about them.

'Let us go in here for a minute,' said Ailie. And they went.

Nearly in the middle of the churchyard was a grave, with a simple upright headstone to it, on which was inscribed—

IN MEMORY OF
ALISON REID,
WIFE OF DANIEL ROSE,
BORN, JUNE 8TH, 1814,
DIED, AUGUST 6TH, 1839.
AGED 25.
AND OF HER INFANT SON,
BORN, AUGUST 1ST,
DIED, AUGUST 10TH, 1839.

At this grave Ailie stopped, and looked wistfully down at the brown grass that covered it, and read the inscription, while two great tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

I wonder if the angel mother, with the angel baby in her arms, looked down and saw the little daughter she had left so long ago in the cold world, and saw, with her angel vision, what was in the aching, doubting little heart.

There were flowers planted on the grave, but the little rose-trees were bare now, and the snow-drops had not begun to push their green spikes above the earth.

'I think,' said Ailie, turning away with a heavy sigh, 'that the happiest people are those who die young.'

'My darling,' said Mercy gently, 'they are happy in their rest; we must be happy in our work. Life is a grand thing, Ailie.'

Then they went home, and at the corner of the

road they parted. Mercy said, smiling, as she bade her good-bye, 'I think the tangled skein will come right before long, darling. You don't quite know how much you care for Robbie. Maybe if you weren't so sure of him, you would know better.'

Those light words came back to her remembrance painfully before very long.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE SAD SEA WAVES.

FOR the month of January wore itself out in storm and tempest, and the days passed to Ailie more and more slowly, and Robbie did not come home. I wonder if those who know nothing of seafaring people can fully realize what is meant by those simple words, 'watching for his ship?' The heart-sickening expectation —the slow creeping hours—the lying awake at night and feeling every wave break on one's heart—the gradual rising of doubt, never for an indefinite time to be changed into certainty—the springing up of the heart with wild beats of hope at the sight of some far-off sail—the utter prostration of despair when the sail comes nearer, and, after all, it is not the one watched for,—those are things that make the face wan and the eyes pitifully eager, as poor Ailie's became before February was a week old. She had

no one to whom she could speak; she could not even say to any one, 'Why doesn't Robbie's ship come home?' Mercy was more closely tied at home than ever, and there was no one else who knew or cared anything about it. When the twice-a-week paper came in, she used to wait, trembling and sick with fear, till her father had deliberately read through all the political articles and general news, for all which Ailie did not care in the least, and then she would get hold of it and turn to the shipping list. But there was never a word about the Pelican. Robbie had sailed from Glasgow, and Ailie tried to make herself believe sometimes that she had somehow missed the paper telling of the Pelican's return, and that perhaps this time Robbie would not take the long, useless journey north to Inverurquhart. What reason had she ever given him, she asked herself, for taking that journey to see her? And there was no one else he cared to see. But her heart told her that, through the wildest winds that ever blew, Robbie would come straight to her, if he were in Scotland.

Notwithstanding all her watching, two people saw the first mention of the Pelican before she did. It was one of those brief paragraphs which are common enough every winter, so common that inland-bred people only glance carelessly at them, without much thought of the death-struggles of strong men out on

the lonely sea, and the sick weariness of watching hearts at home, of which they tell.

Mr. Rose had taken the paper into his office, and was reading it there, beside his fire; he was running his eye down the columns, when he came on the following:

'The ship Pelican, which was due in the middle of January, from New York, has not yet been heard of. She sailed from New York on the 4th December, and was spoken with on the 10th of January by the captain of the barque "City of Glasgow." She was then labouring in a heavy sea, and had suffered considerable damage from the weather. It is feared that she has gone down with all hands.'

He read this over thoughtfully. It would be wrong to say that he was glad that so terrible a fate had overtaken so many brave men, yet there was a sort of lurking satisfaction at the bottom of his heart that Robbie M'Intosh was safely out of the way, and could never come back any more. Yet he was sorry for Ailie too—as he would have been when she was a child, had a favourite toy been lost or broken. Hardly more than that; for he had noticed nothing of the weary look that had been in Ailie's face for weeks past. But when she stole into the office, after he had left it, to look for the paper, it was nowhere to be found.

The other person who read the paragraph, did so

after a very different fashion. Mercy was sitting in the parlour, in which her aunt still spent the day on her sofa, and was reading aloud snatches of news now and then. She saw the paragraph, and was on the point of crying out to her aunt that Robbie was drowned, but checked herself in time. Miss Lester was too weak to bear any sudden shock.

'Auntie,' she said, after giving herself time to make her voice calm and steady, 'there have been a great many ships lost this winter.'

Miss Lester's quick ear detected immediately that something lay behind this general statement. She thought for a moment, and then asked, 'Has Robbie M'Intosh's ship come in yet?'

'No.' She went closer to the sofa, and took her aunt's hand. 'I fear, auntie, that it will never come home.'

Miss Lester lay silent. She was too near the 'shining shore' herself to receive such an announcement otherwise than calmly. But she said, 'Poor Ailie! poor little lamb!'

'If you can spare me for an hour to-morrow, auntie, I will go to her.'

And all night Mercy kept starting awake, thinking with a pained heart how she should tell such news.

Ailie had been sitting nearly all morning at the window that looked towards the sea. Her heart had grown very sick, poor child, but she still kept

hoping on against hope. Coming from her long watch to warm her chilled hands at the fire, she looked towards the other window, and saw Mercy coming up the garden path. She ran to open the door for her, and drew her into the parlour.

Mercy sat down without speaking, pained to the heart by the sight of that wan little face, in which the brown eyes showed so large.

'I am so glad to see you!' said Ailie. Yet she did not smile; her lips seemed to have forgotten the way. 'Is Miss Lester better to-day, to be able to spare you?' Then, with a sharp cry, 'Mercy, why don't you speak? Why do you look so?'

'Darling—I came out to-day—because I thought you mightn't have heard—and I couldn't bear that any one should tell you but me.'

'Tell me! What?' The terror in those wild eyes was pitiful to see.

Mercy could hardly speak. 'My own Ailie,' she said, putting both her arms round her; 'my poor little darling, anything is better than that you should watch longer for—what can't come. It is no use watching any longer, my darling, my pet.'

She called her those tender words because she could not help it, not because Ailie heard or cared for them. She seemed to hear nothing after those words, 'It is no use watching any longer.' She stood quite still, white and cold, and calm as a stone.

'Ailie, Ailie, don't look so.' Mercy drew her down on her lap, and kissed and cried over her, but she never shed a tear. Her head sunk heavily on Mercy's shoulder, and lay there, with the wide, wild eyes open. Mercy was growing very much frightened, when she spoke in a still, unmoved tone. 'How did you hear?'

'I saw it last night in the papers. See, I have cut out the paragraph for you.'

She read it, and a change came into her eyes. 'It doesn't say—we don't know that there is no hope. The ship may have been detained.'

'My darling, it must seem very cruel, but the worst of all things for you is to go on hoping and watching. I fear there can be no hope. A whole month, remember.'

Then they were silent, clinging close to one another, till Mercy said, 'It grieves me to leave you, darling, but I must go.'

Ailie rose quite calmly. 'Yes, I know. It was good of you to come.'

Mercy stood looking down at her, with a very troubled face. 'I know you can't take much good from anything yet, my poor child. But Ailie, if you would try to keep hold of Christ's hand through all. He loves you. Don't get to doubt God's love because He sends sorrow.'

'No,' said Ailie. Her perfect quietness was some-

thing terrible. 'I won't doubt God's love; though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!' She said the last words very low, but distinctly, and then Mercy had to go away.

'If she had only cried,' she said, when telling what had passed to her aunt.

'She doesn't believe it yet,' said the blind lady.

Ailie's temperament was one intensely susceptible both of pain and of pleasure. She suffered much more than it would have been possible for Mercy to suffer; not that Mercy was in any sense shallow, but she had one of those large, calm natures, whose sympathies are so widely diffused, that the kind of acute, concentrated anguish which an organization like Ailie's was capable of, was not possible to her. Then Ailie had a vivid imagination, which, while it was often a source of the most exquisite pleasure, could, on occasion, become an instrument of terrible torture. To her there was not only always present the fact that Robbie was lost to her, and those words that come to all of us some time during our lives, wailing through her heart, 'Never, never more;' but also there were constantly and vividly presented to her mind, pictures that were startling in their distinctness,—pictures of men drowning in the dark, cold night, of all the horrors of shipwreck, with stories of which, coming as she did of seafaring people, and living in a seafaring place, she had

been all her life familiar. Those pictures came to her most distinctly at night, when the house was still, and she lay in her dark, lonely room, listening to the breaking of the waves on the bulwark outside. She saw them when she lay awake, through long, weary hours, and when she fell asleep she dreamed of them, and woke again bathed in a cold sweat, her heart beating wildly.

Then she began to hate the sea. And shut in as she was by it on all sides, with waves to look at from her window, and the sound of waves in her ears all day and all night long, this itself was a cause of infinite torture to her. She would have given worlds to shut out that waste of grey, seething water from her eyes, and stop its relentless beating, if only for one half hour.

And when you bear in mind that all this anguish was borne in perfect silence, without a cry or a word to anybody, you will not wonder that her step became feeble, and her cheeks whiter than ever, and her brown eyes far too bright and wide, and that into her face there came the look that young faces wear when they are grown very weary of the world, and begin to fade from it.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

ON one of those wild February nights, two people sat watching in the upper room of Miss Lester's house. For some days before the messenger had come from the Celestial City, and he gave her 'a sure token that he was a true messenger, and was come to bid her make haste to be gone. The token was an arrow with a point, sharpened with love, let easily into her heart.'

The blind lady lay very quietly on her bed, as if she were indeed calmly watching for the moment when she should cross the waters of Jordan. Mercy sat beside the bed, holding one of her aunt's wasted hands in hers, as if she wanted to go down to the very river's brink with her. The other watcher was an old woman, one of those curious characters that are found still in out-of-the-way Highland places like Inverurquhart. There had hardly been a new life born into the world, or a soul departed from

it, for the last sixty years in the town, without 'Mammy' being there to watch, with the same mingling of superstition and stolidity, either the birth-pangs or the death-throe. She was crouching beside the fire on a low stool, now and then whispering to Mercy, who scarcely heard her. They had been sitting in just the same position for hours, till the night wore on into that chill time which comes before early morning. Miss Lester had slept nearly all night, only stirring now and then to ask that her lips might be moistened, and then sinking back into the same heavy doze.

Mercy had enjoyed much sweet converse with her during the past weeks, but she yearned for one more last word. She feared, and yet hoped, that the spirit might steal gently away in sleep, without pain or struggle.

'Eh, but it's a wild nicht to die in!' said Mammy, as a strong blast shook the house. 'No that it can be ought to her, the blessed saint.'

'Will she waken first?' asked Mercy, speaking for the first time for hours.

'Yin canna tell.' The old woman came to the bedside and looked at the placid sleeping face. 'Maybe she'll wauken, and maybe no. She'll gang when daylight comes in.'

Mercy hid her face in the bedclothes for a minute, but soon looked up again. She grudged to take her

eyes away from that dear face, as long as it lay there with the life in it.

The stormy hours wore slowly away, and at last the faint light of a grey dawn crept in at the window.

Then at that hour when light and darkness meet, and at which the mysterious link between soul and body is so often broken, there came a change upon the dying woman's face. The blind eyelids quivered, and a faint sweet smile parted the lips.

'Mercy.' It was scarcely more than a whisper.

'Yes, auntie. I am here.'

'I see the lights—of the City, you know. They are so beautiful! They are growing very bright.'

'The river is between yet, auntie. Have you no fear?'

'I feel it cold about my feet, but I don't fear it. My Beloved is beside me. I feel his arm, though I can't see Him yet. Soon I shall.'

The sentences came slowly, with gaspings for breath between; it seemed as if she were just about to go down into those dark waters, across which she saw the gleaming lights.

Then she sunk into one of those short sleeps that come to the dying, and Mercy thought she had heard her voice for the last time.

Suddenly, with a strength that seemed miraculous, she sat straight up in bed, and said, in a loud, clear voice, 'Open the window, and let my soul go free!'

The old woman hurried to the window and threw it wide open. And out through the stormy, grey morning went the redeemed soul, no longer blind, up to that Celestial City, where it beheld the face of Christ.

. . . . .

On that same night poor Willie the idiot had died. It was curious that those two souls, the one which had seen so clearly in darkness, and the other which had been so blind in the midst of light, should go in together at the pearly gates, to the brightness of the heavenly city. I hardly know to which of them the new dawn must have been brighter. Willie died very quietly, with hardly a word to any one. She had lain perfectly still all day, and only the constant watching of years enabled her sister to notice any change on her rigid, expressionless face. A little while before she died Nancy said to her, 'Are ye happy, Willie?'

'Ay. He's wi' us. He speaks till us.'

'What does He say, Willie, woman?'

'He just says, "Come, Willie."—Ay, we're gaun.'

And so, in obedience to his call, she went.

Nancy's long labour of love was over; and as she looked down at the still figure on the bed, hardly more still, now that the breath had gone out of it, than it had been for years, she felt very lonely.

But for Willie a new morning had dawned.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AILIE'S WORK.

AFTER the funeral, Mercy went, at Ailie's urgent request, to stay with her for a few weeks. She was tired out by watching and anxiety, and the reaction that comes after a long effort at self-control, and she needed to rest before going back to her work. Mrs. Lynne had relented towards her, and had come to her full of sympathy and kindness, and wanted her to go with her to Inverurquhart House. She should have perfect rest for as long as she cared to have it, Louisa promised; but Mercy had already said that she would go to Ailie. She could be more thoroughly quiet there, and she wanted to be quiet for a little while; and, besides, Ailie needed her.

It had struck a sudden pang to Mercy's heart when she first saw Ailie after some weeks of separation from her. She noticed immediately how feeble

her step was, how her eyes were unnaturally large and bright, and how hot her little hands were. She had questioned her about her health as closely as she dared without frightening her; and when she heard of sleepless nights, of loathing food, of lassitude and fatigue, she said to herself, 'Oh, my little Ailie, am I going to lose you too?'

And so she went as soon as possible to the Red House, as the Inverurquhart folks called Mr. Rose's dwelling. Her companionship was very good for Ailie, to whom the loneliness of the past weeks had been exceedingly hurtful. Mercy drew her away from that window where she had kept watch for so many days, looking out at the cold, winter sea, with wistful eyes that had ceased to hope for anything. She talked to her, and drew her gently to talk of Robbie,—of his gentleness, and courage, and goodness, and how he would have made a name for himself in the world if God had been pleased to spare him. And sometimes Mercy would speak of heaven, of the more perfect life there, of the glory of seeing God face to face, of the riddles which should be solved there, and the lives that seemed broken off short here, spoiled and unfinished, which should be rounded there into a glorious whole. Those talks soothed Ailie for a little, though the craving of the empty, hungry heart, that only now began to know itself, always came back again.

One evening, when Mr. Rose came in from his office to tea, Ailie was sleeping on the sofa. She slept very little at night, and those brief snatches of sleep during the day had become usual with her. The room looked very cosy in the bright firelight that glittered on the tea-table, which Bell had laid softly for fear of disturbing Miss Ailie. Mercy was sitting on the opposite side of the hearth, looking across at the sleeping face.

Now Mr. Rose was not an observant man out of his own line of business, and Ailie's failing strength had not as yet been noticed by him. He came in just as usual with his reticent, business face, and stood for a minute looking down into the fire, the figures hardly cleared out of his mind yet. Then he turned and looked down at Ailie.

Long ago, many years before this little daughter had been born to him, Mr. Rose had lost a sister whom he had loved. She had faded away as girls do sometimes, without any very decided ailment; just a gradual loss of strength and appetite, a slow fever in her veins, a light in her eyes, and a beautiful crimson on her cheeks, and then she was gone, no one knew exactly how. She had lived to be about Ailie's age; and as Mr. Rose looked down at his daughter's face, it suddenly occurred to him that she had become very like his sister. He bent over her, and examined her face attentively, while Mercy sat

quiet with a beating heart, hoping he would notice the change in it.

He did notice; the sharpened features, the cheeks so fallen from their girlish roundness, could hardly fail to strike him painfully. He touched one of her hands; it was very hot.

Then he drew himself straight up, as a sudden spasm of dread contracted his heart.

'Miss Lester,' he said, in a low voice, crossing to where Mercy was sitting, 'is Ailie quite well?'

'I fear she is very far from well,' answered Mercy, her head drooping from his searching eyes.

'What is the matter?'

'I can hardly tell you the precise nature of her illness. Her strength has failed very much, she doesn't eat, and she sleeps badly at night.'

Mr. Rose was silent, recalling with keen, pained memory, the symptoms which had preceded his young sister's death.

'Can you think of any cause for this illness?'

Mercy looked up at him with her grave, fearless eyes. 'Yes,' she answered, quietly. 'Ailie has had a great grief lately.'

'A grief! What?'

'A person that she liked very much has been drowned.'

'You—you don't mean that sailor?'

'I mean Robbie M'Intosh.'

Mr. Rose uttered an indescribable exclamation, almost a groan, and yet it was angry too. 'I don't believe it,' he said, fiercely. 'She couldn't have cared for him.'

'I think her heart is breaking for him. Your believing it, or not believing it, can't make any difference now. It can't call Robbie back to life, or make her happy and well again.' Mercy spoke out boldly. And with men like Mr. Rose such speaking is best.

He hung his head. He had always felt a little afraid of Mercy, in her large, grand calmness. Perhaps, though he would never have allowed it to himself, her opinion of things would have weighed as much with him as any one's. He groaned again in bitterness of heart. 'O God! no. My only child!'

Mercy's heart was touched. She was not fond of Mr. Rose, but she was sorry for him; and she knew that such natures as his are capable of great suffering. She was going to say some words of hope and comfort, but just then Ailie awoke.

She had been lying in a state between sleeping and waking for the last minute; and, as in a dream, she had heard her father's voice say, 'My only child.' And then she woke up altogether, and said to herself, 'I am going to die.'

She rose from the sofa, smiling faintly with a curious feeling of mingled excitement and content-

ment. She had something new to think about. A wider future was opened to her by that idea, and she could turn away the eyes of her mind from the past to look at it. There was not much fear of death in those first minutes of contemplating it; she had passed through what seemed to her a time of more terror and bitterness than any that could come to her again.

She went to her father, who was still standing on the rug, with his back to the fire. She could not see his face clearly, for it was in shadow; but she guessed that it was very sad. She put her arms gently round him, and laid her curly head on his breast. He neither moved nor spoke, but stood, to all appearance, as dumb and hard as a stone.

It must be hard for people who are capable of loving and suffering, to be incapable of expressing either, by word or sign. There are such people in the world.

All that evening, and through the night, while she lay wakeful by Mercy's side, Ailie kept pondering that one great idea. It wrapt her whole soul in a mysterious awe, and wonder, and peace. She ceased to listen to the sound of those weary waves beating against the bulwark; and, though the wind was high, she scarcely heard it. The next morning, after she had wakened from the heavy morning sleep that comes to those who have watched most of the night,

another thought came to her. She was alone in her room, dressing slowly, with the feebleness of one who is tired before the day's work begins. Mercy had gone down stairs long before; she had dressed quietly, and slipped away to give Mr. Rose his breakfast, which he liked rather early. She knew that Ailie needed all the rest she could get, and so left her to sleep on undisturbed. And as Ailie sat before her little mirror, brushing out her soft curls, and looking at the reflection of her face, so white and shadowy in the glass, this thought came to her, 'I am going to die. I have not very long to stay in the world, and I have done no work yet. I will leave nothing behind me that can make the world the least bit richer, or comfort a single soul in it.'

And then she rose, and knelt down beside the chair where she had been sitting, and prayed that God would let her do at least one bit of true work before she died.

Mercy had kept her breakfast hot for her in the parlour, and had arranged it daintily with her own hands, and put some pale snowdrops beside Ailie's plate. She smiled at her, and played with her tea and toast, and looked wistfully at the little snowdrops.

'Poor little things,' she said, 'they come out too soon to get much good of their lives! It's a little

sad for them never to know what summer means, is it not, Mercy? Like people that die young.'

Mercy just glanced at her, and then, looking away, said steadily, 'There is no heaven for flowers, Ailie, darling. People that die young will know what summer is up there.'

After breakfast, Ailie brought out her little writing-desk, which had lain untouched for weeks. And all that day, and for a great part of a good many days afterwards, she was very silent, lying thinking on the sofa, and then writing a little, and then thinking again. Mercy did not tease her by talking to her much; she guessed a good deal of what was passing in Ailie's mind,—words dropped now and then helped her to it.

The Inverurquhart doctor began to come every day, having been told to do so by Mr. Rose. Ailie smiled at him in a sweet, baffling sort of way, and answered his questions, and swallowed his strengthening medicines obediently; and the old doctor thought to himself that some day she would slip quietly through his fingers, and be gone, in spite of anything he could do to keep her.

You will not be surprised to learn that out of Ailie's sorrow came her first real poem. I think it is Goethe who says, 'There are many echoes, but few voices.' Now Ailie's poems hitherto had been only echoes, very sweet and tender, with the ring of

true poetry about them, and here and there a line flashing out a revelation of latent power—but echoes after all. But this poem, written after her time of greatest bitterness, when all God's waves and billows had been going over her, and deep had been calling to deep within her soul—which was written, too, under the conviction that it was to be a legacy left by her to such in the world as were capable of inheriting it—this poem was an unmistakeable voice.

One of those voices which, being once uttered, can never die, but go forth crying in the wilderness, and finding out souls here and there who are able to hear it, and to whom it becomes thenceforth living, beloved, a something which enters into them and becomes part of themselves, never to be separated from them any more, for ever,—this I conceive to be the aim and end of all true art, whether it be poetry or painting.

Ailie's intellect had been as nearly as possible unused for some time; it had been, indeed, in a kind of torpor, almost like death, lying still in the cold and darkness. Now, when it awoke and came out to the light again, she found that it had grown very much during that time of rest. We are apt to murmur sometimes over time that seems lost and wasted; but, after all, it is often during those periods of seeming idleness that our souls grow most.

Of course I cannot reproduce for you this poem of Ailie's; it was infinitely higher than anything that I could even give you an echo of; but I will try to give you some idea of what it was about.

In the first part, Simon Peter walked in the garden of Gethsemane alone, and with a great loneliness in his soul. It was during those terrible hours, when the hope and faith of his life seemed to have failed. Christ was lying dead; those hands, which had never been stretched out but to heal and bless, were folded idly now, with their wounds still fresh, upon his breast; those feet, that had walked so many miles, tired and homeless, were resting at last; those gracious lips were dumb; those tender eyes closed; there was no fear or hope now of any more looks of loving reproach for Peter. And in the man's deep, passionate heart, there was raging an agony of regret, of yearning, of unutterable self-reproach. It was not only that his Friend and Master, the Man whom he had loved with all the love of his nature, was dead, and that between them there was the great stone at the mouth of the sepulchre; but He had died, so far as Peter knew, with the memory of those false curses of his still ringing in his ears, and the sense of his friend's treachery adding bitterness to death. And now it was all over for ever. Against the irrevocable, the man's heart rose up in wild revolt. If he could only tell the Master once,

that, in spite of the meanness that his coward heart had taught him, he still loved Him! If it were only possible that for a little while those deaf ears could be unstopped, that he might confess to Him all his guilt and agony! If he could get another look from the Master's eyes, that would dim ever so faintly the keenness of the memory of that one last look that haunted him so!

It was impossible that at that time Peter should understand anything of the scheme of salvation—that scheme which made Christ's seeming failure the greatest success that was ever achieved. The man's faith, in the meantime, had sunk down shivering at the ignominious close of a pure and perfect life, at the sudden failing of those powers that had saved others, and did not save himself. But more than all this anguish of doubt, was the anguish for the wrong done to his Friend, for the love that had failed in time of need, for the cowardice that had lied.

And it was all in vain: the leaves of the olive-trees rustled above his head, the purple hills looked calmly down on him, and the past was dead and buried for evermore.

This was the first part.

Many years had passed, and Simon Peter lay in prison. It was the evening before his crucifixion; and as he lay alone, with the peace of God in his soul, and all about him, the memory of his past life

came back to him as in a dream. He remembered the time of his bitterest agony, when his heart was empty and desolate, and Christ was dead, and there was no hope for him either in life or death. And then came back to him the exquisite tenderness of the Master's look, as it rested upon him again, and the divine comfort of his voice, asking, 'Lovest thou me?'

The human heart of Christ must have understood the anguish that had been in Peter's heart, when it gave him leave to make those three avowals of love. It was the very healing that the wounded soul needed, though there was bitterness mingled with its sweetness, as there must be in all true healing.

And now those cowardly lies had been so far atoned for by the life of courageous truth that had followed. And to-morrow the last act of the drama was to be played out, and before another evening he would look into the Master's face once more, and repeat those words, 'Thou knowest that I love Thee.'

As he lay looking towards the barred window of his prison, beyond which the sun was setting in gold and vermilion, he seemed to see the gates of heaven opening, and his soul went out in yearning to greet the Master. And then the coolness and peace of night came down on him, and he slept as calmly as a little child.

I think you will be able to trace the connection between Ailie's suffering and her work, and see how, through things seen and temporal, God had taught her some things that were unseen and eternal.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE SECRET OF THE SEA.

ON the morning of the 5th of March the little town of Inverurquhart was in a restless, unsettled mood. Women, with children in their arms, stood at the tops of the lanes which led down to the sea, looking at the glimpses they got there of the seething water. Sailors and fishermen stood in groups about the pier, looking out for the boats of their fellow-townsmen which had not yet come in, and exchanging remarks about the weather. All agreed that a great storm was at hand, which would probably exceed in violence all the many past storms of that singularly wild winter. The air was oppressively still, the sky grey, with fitful bursts of sunshine, that shone curiously down on the anxious faces clustered on the pier. The sea presented an extraordinary appearance,—it was nearly black, but broken here and there by small, angry-looking tips of foam. The

space between the Craigs was studded by the brown sails of fishing-boats, that came beating in through the great gateway, glad to find themselves in comparatively smooth water.

Mercy had been standing at the window of the Red House parlour for the last hour, looking anxiously out, as one fishing-boat after another rounded the Craigs and got safely into the bay. She knew many of the fishermen, and was hoping, with keen anxiety, that all the Inverurquhart boats would get in before the storm burst.

'Surely they must be all in now,' she said to Ailie, who was lying on the sofa, with her face turned stedfastly away from the terrible black sea, of which one glimpse had been enough for her. 'Oh!' she went on, 'there is a Dutch vessel coming lumbering in; a great clumsy thing. She seems to have some difficulty in rounding the Craig. No—they are all right. Perhaps some one is on board who knows the coast here. I'm glad they are safe.'

Ailie sat up, and looked out at the ship, which was slowly gliding past, a gleam of sunshine lighting up for a moment her seamed yellow sails and great black hull.

'Mercy,' she said, as she lay back again on her cushion, 'did you get that key?'

'Yes, darling,' said Mercy, looking round. 'But you won't try to go to-day?'

'Why not? It is very calm now, and the storm won't burst till afternoon. We may have days of bad weather after this, and then—I mightn't be able to go, Mercy.'

She spoke eagerly, with a spot of red in each of her pale cheeks, and a wistful look in her eyes that Mercy could not withstand. She came to the sofa and kissed her.

'Well, darling, you shall go. Though I don't know that it is wise, Ailie.'

It was one of the fancies which those who are sick and sorrowful sometimes take, and which are so strong that to fight against them is useless pain. Ailie wanted to go and look at the cottage room in which Robbie had lived, and which she had last seen on the night when he had asked her to be his wife, and she had told him that she could not care for him. Mercy knew where the key was, and had promised to get it for her, half doubting whether the result would be the satisfying of a restless longing, or the exciting of fresh pain.

The two girls put on their hats and shawls, and went out. Ailie's garden was gay with crocuses, standing in their stiff regiments, and here and there, in a sheltered corner, a bunch of Christmas roses put forth its faded-looking blossoms.

'How still everything is!' she said. 'See, Mercy, those twigs don't move in the least. And the air

seems full of something—the elements of the storm, perhaps, that have not gathered themselves together yet. It will be terrible when it comes; I don't remember ever having seen the sea just like that.'

She turned her face from it, shuddering, and they walked quickly on.

Robbie's cottage had that air of desolation which always comes over a house which has stood empty, even for a few months. There was something sad, even, in the look of his bright row of crocuses, blooming themselves away, with no one to see. The large key creaked in the lock as Mercy turned it, and the door jarred on its hinges as it was pushed open. The room was just as Robbie had left it, in the trim order of an unused place. A few cold ashes lay on the hearth, where he had lighted the fire to cook his last breakfast before leaving. Some books were neatly arranged on the window-sill, where he used to study; and his slate, with a problem drawn on it, and the bit of dry sponge tied to it, hung against the wall.

Mercy felt herself shivering; it seemed to her like standing beside a new-made grave; but when she looked at Ailie, she saw that her face was very calm. She went over to the window and touched one or two of the books, then lifted the slate, and looked at the problem on it.

'Would you mind leaving me alone for a little?'

she said quietly. 'I should like to stay here a little while by myself.'

Mercy hesitated. For a moment the thought of Ailie's fainting, when left alone, terrified her; but as she looked at her, a wan smile flitted across her face for an instant.

'Don't be frightened to leave me, dear. It quiets me to be here. Do you know, Mercy,' she went on, looking round, 'that when I become ill—worse than I am now, I mean—just before the end, I would like to come here? I think I could die so calmly in this room. It's only a silly fancy of mine, you know. I know it couldn't be.'

She sat down on a chair that had been left beside the hearth, and waited for Mercy to go. And Mercy, seeing nothing else that she could do, went out, and closed the door softly behind her.

Then she thought that she would have time for a hurried walk to the pier, to make inquiries as to how many of the Inverurquhart fishing-boats had come in. She found it crowded—fishermen just arrived, wives who had been looking out for them, sailors and idlers of various descriptions. The people knew Mercy well, and made way for her, answering her questions with a 'Oor boats are a' in noo, thank the Lord!' And she repeated 'Thank the Lord,' with a gladness that came from the bottom of her heart. Every one was looking at the

Dutch vessel, which was casting anchor out in the deep water. Mercy lingered to look with the rest; and as she looked, a boat was lowered from the ship's side, and two or three men leapt into her.

'Surely I should ken that man,' said a keen-eyed sailor, who stood near Mercy. 'Thon's no a Dutchman.'

'I thocht there was yin o' oor ain folk aboard her, by the way she came round the Craig,' said another.

'There's twa Dutchmen,' said the first speaker; 'an' the ither is,—man, I dinna like to say, for fear I should be wrang.'

'Wha is it?' cried several excited voices, for the man's manner excited curiosity.

'Ye've glegger een than onybody in the toon, Sandy,' said one, encouragingly.

'If I'm right,' he said, as the boat pushed off from the ship's side, 'it's ane that we thocht was food for fishes by noo.' Mercy's heart gave a sudden leap. She, too, had seen the figure in the boat, and a wild thought had flashed across her. She stood silent and trembling. 'It is—ay, it is—' said the sailor, as the boat neared the pier, while all hung on his lips, and straining eyes watched the boat, 'ay—I'm no wrang lads—it's Robbie M'Intosh!'

There were exclamations of unbelief and wonder from all sides; but in a few minutes they all could see for themselves that it was indeed Robbie, and a

dozen large hands were stretched out to catch the rope thrown from the boat, and drew it alongside the pier.

He came up the steps that led from the harbour. The people crowded round him, grasping his hands, and pouring out eager questions. He answered them as briefly as he could, for his eye had caught Mercy's immediately, and his heart yearned for news. She stood watching him, noticing how brown his face was, as if worn by much exposure to the weather; how shabby his sailor's clothes were; noticing, too, the perfect courtesy and gentleness with which he spoke to the people about him. As he stood there among his towns-people, men born in the same rank as his had been, but who were without his power to rise above it, Mercy knew that she was looking at one of those true men, and heaven-made gentlemen, honourable, chivalrous, and daring, who do rise up from among the people once in a century or so.

Then he crossed over to her, and she held out both hands to him. The other people on the pier fell back from them, and they went away together. They were nearly silent, till the town—where men and women came to doors and windows to stare at him, as at a man risen from the dead—was left behind.

Then Mercy spoke. 'Robbie, where have you

been? Why did you not write to tell us of your safety? Do you know that we thought you lost, and that some one has been suffering terribly?'

'Who?' he asked, below his breath.

'You know. The only one likely to care.'

'Is it Miss Ailie?'

'Yes. Robbie, I hope you are not too late. I hope that the joy of seeing you may not finish what her sorrow for you began.'

Then she told him of how weak Ailie had been, and how they had seen her fading slowly before their eyes, without being able to help her. He was very much shaken; it was a revelation to him in different ways, and he hardly knew whether pain or joy was the predominant feeling, when he heard that the treasure he had so coveted was his, and that he ran such a risk of losing it. When he was calmer, he told Mercy of how his ship had been wrecked on his homeward voyage; how he and a few more of the crew had drifted about in a boat, exposed to winds and waves, hunger and thirst, for many days; of how, when their last drop of water and crumb of biscuit were exhausted, and they had lain down to die, they had been picked up by a Dutch vessel which was returning from the Cape, laden with ivory; of how the Dutch sailors had treated them kindly, and nursed them back to life again, and brought them safely into Antwerp harbour.

'The first thing I heard there, Miss Mercy,' said Robbie, 'was the sound of the chimes. They are always playing, and you can never make out what tune it is. But I thought it the sweetest music I had ever heard.'

Then he had got aboard a trading vessel that was just about to sail, which vessel had been driven into Inverurquhart Bay for shelter that morning.

'And so the Lord has brought me safe back to my own door again,' he said, taking off his cap for a moment, reverently.

Before they reached his cottage they had arranged that Mercy was to go in first and break the news to Ailie as gently as she could. Robbie could hardly refrain from weeping, when he heard how the poor little thing had crept down there to look at his room.

When Mercy went in, she found Ailie sitting just where she had left her, beside the cold hearth. Her face was calm, but her eyes seemed heavy with weeping. She looked up as the door opened.

'It was good of you to leave me so long,' she said. 'I think it has done me good to come here. I am ready to go now.'

'Wait,' said Mercy, laying her hand on Ailie's shoulder, and going behind her chair. 'Ailie, darling, I have something to tell you. I have been down at the pier since leaving you, and—I've heard a very strange story.'

'Must you tell it now?—here?' said Ailie, a little wearily.

'Yes. Here is the best place, darling. I have heard that a sailor, belonging to this town, whom all his friends here believed to be drowned, has come home. He was picked up by a vessel, and brought safe to shore.'

Ailie rose from her seat and looked into Mercy's face. Her quick perception caught the truth at once. Mercy wondered to see how calm she was; only one quiver passed over her frame. Then she looked towards the door, which was half open. A shadow that lay across the threshold moved slightly.

'Robbie!' Her voice was clear and steady. He came in, and coming forward to where she stood, by his own fireside, he held out his arms. Then she was on his breast, her face hidden.

Mercy went out and left them; and I think that we too had better go out as the door closes; I do not like to intrude on the sacredness of that first meeting.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE STORM.

WHEN Mercy came back an hour afterwards, they were sitting hand in hand, talking very quietly; and when she looked at Ailie, she saw that two delicate roses, like those pale China roses that sometimes bloom among Christmas snows, had blossomed on her cheeks.

'You must come home now, Ailie,' she said. 'I think the bursting of the storm is not far off.'

Robbie went to the window. 'It will be something terrible when it comes,' he said. 'I have seen a sea like that only once or twice before.' Then he went to Ailie and took her hand, a wonderful love shining down on her out of his serious blue eyes. 'Does the wind frighten you, Ailie? I know you hear it very plainly at nights in the Red House.'

'I don't think I'll mind it now,' she answered, smiling. 'You see we are so selfish. We don't think so much of others when our own are safe.'

And then she blushed most beautifully to think what her words implied.

'I am so happy,' she said to Mercy on their way home. 'I hardly dare to think how happy I am.'

'Think of it as much as you can, darling. God sent you this happiness as something to be thought about; a precious gift, straight from himself. Don't think that He grudges it to you.'

'He has been very good to me,' was all that Ailie said.

When they got into the Red House, Mercy took Ailie upstairs to her own room, and made her lie down to rest. And before long she fell into a calm, deep, healing sleep, such as she had not known for many weeks.

'I think she will get well,' thought Mercy, as she stood looking down at the quiet sleeping face. 'Dear little Ailie! My pretty fragile flower! You will blossom into life and beauty under the sunshine God has sent to you.'

She went round to Mr. Rose's office, and found him before his big desk, deep in his great account-books.

'Well?' he said, not over politely, when he saw her; but she drew a chair to his fire, and seated herself deliberately.

'I want to speak to you, Mr. Rose. Will you please give me your attention for five minutes?'

He got down from his tall stool very unwillingly, and stood on the rug before her, his hands in his pockets, and a decidedly unamiable expression on his face. A line about 'bearding the lion in his den,' came across Mercy's mind as she looked at him.

'Mr. Rose, I have a very wonderful bit of news to give you. Robbie M'Intosh has come home.'

An odd sort of grunt was the only answer, and his brow was certainly no clearer. She told him the story of Robbie's shipwreck, in few words, as it had been told to her. 'I think we have great cause to thank God,' she said seriously.

Another very ungracious grunt. 'Well, *he* has. I hope he will take it to heart.'

This was said very severely, as if Robbie had been previously leading a depraved life, and Mr. Rose charitably hoped he might be brought to a sense of his sins.

'Robbie is not the man to take God's dealings with him lightly,' answered Mercy. 'He is a very good man, sir. A brave, upright, God-fearing man. He has keen intelligence too; you might put him in any station, and he would not disgrace it.'

Mr. Rose moved impatiently. 'It may be so. But what have I to do with all this?'

Mercy looked full at him, and he looked away from her calm, grave eyes uneasily. 'You have everything to do with it, sir. Your child's life is

now, to a certain extent, in your hands. Since she has seen Robbie, it seems as if some healing medicine had been administered to her. She is sleeping now as she has not slept for weeks. I believe God has sent healing to her by Robbie's hand.'

'This is mere sentimental folly,' he burst out, angrily. 'The man is a mere common sailor, without education, without position. Am I to give my daughter to a beggar?'

Mercy's eyes flashed for a moment, then she was still. 'You mistake, sir,' she said, with the haughty look and gesture that high breeding gives, and which has a subduing effect on men like Mr. Rose. 'Robbie is as far from being a beggar as I am, or as you are. You yourself, Mr. Rose, have but lately risen from the people. Your own father was what Robbie will very soon become, if left to himself, the master of a small coasting vessel. But he is fit for far higher things than that.' Then suddenly changing her tone to one of winning sweetness, 'Come, Mr. Rose, you are keen enough to know a first-rate man when you see him. Clear the mists of prejudice from your eyes, and learn to know Robbie as he really is, a man immeasurably superior to the class from which he springs. Do a noble thing, and hold out your hand to this man, who is a true gentleman, though, like Christ our Saviour, he is only a working man.'

There was no answer. To all appearance she might as well have wasted her words on a statue.

She went on with increased gravity. 'And if you refuse this healing that God has sent to Ailie, because He has sent it by a working man's hand, then I warn you, she can bear no more sorrow. What use will your money be, if it goes to strangers? Will it make you happier, sir, to go on toiling here, when your only child is lying in the churchyard up there beside her mother?'

He winced a little, and she saw it, though he tried hard to hide it. She went away and left him, scarcely knowing whether to hope that her pleadings would have any effect.

And he, when left alone, went back to his figures, and tried to harden himself.

When Ailie awoke that afternoon, the first thing she was conscious of was the wind. Indeed the noise that wind and water together made was so awful, that it was wonderful how she had slept through it so long. It seemed as if the Red House had suddenly been drifted out to sea, and set down in the midst of a waste of leaping, hungry waves; Ailie almost fancied, as her feet touched the floor, that she felt it rocking.

The room was nearly dark, though it was only four o'clock, and the darkness was of that lowering kind which one feels to be unnatural, and in which

it is difficult not to feel afraid. She looked out at the window, but there was nothing visible except a dim vision of driving rain, and the wild seething water stretching away into the darkness. She went down stairs into the cheerful, fire-lighted parlour, where Mercy was sitting alone. The early dinner hour was long past, and Mercy called to Bell to bring in Ailie's portion, which had been kept hot for her beside the kitchen fire.

'How are you, darling?' Mercy asked, as Ailie, sitting on the rug at her feet, with her plate on a chair, was eating some pigeon pie.

'I am very well, Mercy; do you know I slept so soundly! Can you conceive any one sleeping through that wind?'

'I know you did,' she answered, smiling; 'for I went upstairs to look at you several times. Childie, it made my heart glad to see you sleeping so soundly.'

'And do you know,' went on Ailie, with a little tremulous laugh, 'I am so hungry, I haven't tasted anything so nice as those pigeons for ever so long.'

'Then you must eat enough now to make up for lost time,' said Mercy, stroking the brown curls fondly. 'Darling, I am very thankful that he came before this storm.'

'Ah! How could I have borne it?' said Ailie, shivering. She pushed away her empty plate, and

laid her head down in Mercy's lap. 'Tell me, Mercy, is it right to feel so glad just now, and forget all about those who are out on that dreadful sea to-night? Listen how it dashes! There are men drowning just now, and women's hearts breaking for them, and yet—my heart is as happy as a bird that is safe in its nest.'

'Yes,' said Mercy, 'it is right. There is a kind of selfishness that must be right, because God has implanted it in our hearts as a safeguard. We cling to our own; our keen personal feelings, sorrow, and fear and joy, are for them. To the rest of the world we only give very general and wide sympathies. Can you imagine a human heart bearing to feel real sorrow, pain, anxiety, for all the world?'

'I think Christ's did,' said Ailie.

'Yes. And it broke.'

Mr. Rose came in to tea, grave and silent, with a face nearly as dark as the storm. Mercy had relieved Ailie's mind so far, by telling her that the news had been told to her father; she did not tell her how she had pleaded for her, nor with what doubtful success.

He glanced at his daughter, as she sat at the tea-table, pouring out the tea into old-fashioned, willow-patterned cups. He could not help seeing that into the lovely, transparent little face, had come a change since morning. It was the change from the dreamy,

wearied look of illness, to the delicate tints of returning health. But the change lay chiefly in expression. There was a light of hope and joy in her eyes, and irrepressible smiles quivered about her mouth. It made him angry to see it, and yet he dared not say a harsh word to her.

As the evening wore on, the storm increased in violence, and about nine o'clock the gale seemed to have reached its climax, and was blowing so terrifically that those who sat in the parlour of the Red House could scarcely hear each other speak.

You have not forgotten that the Red House stood on a promontory which ran out into the bay, between the town of Inverurquhart and the Craigs; it was therefore exposed to the full force of the storm which was coming driving in from the east at the great gateway of the Craigs. In the town, though terribly wild, the violence of the wind was not felt so keenly; indeed, on the whole coast of the bay there was not another point so exposed as that on which Mr. Rose's house and factory stood. Ailie had resumed her old position on the rug at Mercy's feet, and the two girls were talking in a low voice. Mr. Rose was sitting at the table with one of his account-books before him; he had come into the house to finish his work, for on that wild night even he scarcely liked to sit alone in his office. The little parlour looked very bright with lamplight and fire-

light; the red glow shone in Ailie's brown eyes, and on the bright wires of the stockings she was knitting. Suddenly the parlour door opened, and into the light and warmth, from the darkness outside, came Robbie M'Intosh. His glazed coat was shining with wet, and his hair all tossed by the wind, and he looked very bright and strong. Ailie rose from her lowly seat, her face glowing with blushes. He gave her one glance and smile, and then walked up to Mr. Rose, who sat frowning at him.

'I am sorry to tell you, sir,' he said, speaking quickly and steadily, 'that your factory is in danger. The waves are beating against your bulwark with tremendous force, and some of the stones are becoming loosened.'

'Impossible!' cried Mr. Rose, starting up, and hurrying to the door. Robbie gently interposed.

'What would you do, sir? It is out of the question to do anything on a night like this. It is as dark as pitch, and the gale is increasing every moment.'

'Then how do you know that my bulwark is giving way?' asked Mr. Rose, looking at him with lowering brows.

'Because I have just come from creeping along the pathway at the top of it. I have a lantern, and I managed to see enough to tell me that mischief was going on.'

'I must see for myself; let me past.'

'You couldn't keep your feet there, sir,' urged Robbie; but Mr. Rose pushed past him.

'I must go after him, Ailie,' he said, looking down on the face that was turned up to him, white with fear. 'Don't be afraid, I'll take care of him.' And he hurried out.

He found Mr. Rose leaning against the corner of the factory, baffled in his first attempt to turn it. As long as they kept on the landward side of the angle they were comparatively sheltered; but whenever they attempted to get to the seaward side of it the wind met them with such stunning force, that it seemed as if every morsel of breath would be knocked out of them before going five yards.

Against this corner Robbie pinned Mr. Rose, absolutely refusing to let him go a step farther.

'It is as much as your life is worth, sir. I tell you, you could not keep your feet on that narrow pathway for two seconds.'

'You kept your feet there.'

'I am a sailor, and a younger man than you. Besides, the wind is rising, and the tide is a foot higher than when I went along. A wave might suck you down in an instant, and there could be no saving you.'

'I tell you, I will go! Man, am I to stand idle and see my factory fall to pieces?'

'You could do nothing,' began Robbie. Then his tone changed. 'Ailie!'

She had stolen out after them, and was now standing close beside him, panting and breathless. 'Oh, my little lamb,' he said, 'this is no place for you. Go back, my Ailie.'

'My father!' she repeated. 'Where is he?'

'Oh, my God! He is gone!' exclaimed Robbie.

He had seized the opportunity while Robbie's attention was for a moment diverted, and had succeeded in rounding the corner.

'I must go after him,' said Robbie. 'I may save him yet. Good-bye, my little one. One kiss, my own Ailie!' He held her in his arms for one second, and was gone. She leant against the wall in the dark, gasping out short prayers, such as we pray when in sore distress, and no other words will come: 'O God, help them! O Lord, have mercy! Oh, save them!'

Along the top of the bulwark, outside the factory wall, ran a pathway of about a foot wide. It had no protection on the seaward side; but from it, at a steep angle, the bulwark sloped down to the sea, in row after row of seemingly imperishable mason-work. Mr. Rose believed his bulwark to be as secure as the Craigs, and would nearly as soon have expected to see them topple over into the sea, as find it giving way.

Along this pathway you can easily understand that it was no easy matter to creep, with the wind blowing great guns, and the tide rising every minute. Already an occasional wave dashed over it, drawing itself back into the heaving mass of water below with that terrible, long-drawn suction, which reminds one of a devouring animal. Robbie saw the light of his own lantern, which Mr. Rose had taken, in front of him, moving unsteadily up and down. Then it came to a standstill, as its bearer was obliged to rest against the factory wall. Robbie dropped on his hands and knees, and crept quickly along the pathway, till he had nearly reached Mr. Rose's feet.

At that moment a furious blast came sweeping down on them, throwing Mr. Rose down on his face, and a great blinding wave came dashing over him, and drew him down into the dark vortex below. Robbie threw out one arm blindly, and caught him. For a minute his own muscles were strained to the uttermost to keep their grip, as the wave fought for its prey. Then it receded, and he drew the heavy, unconscious burden up beside him. He stayed for a minute to rest, and then, cautiously turning round, he addressed himself to the return journey. I hardly think that another man in Inverurquhart could have conveyed Mr. Rose along that pathway, or rather ledge, in safety that night. Had Robbie been a less powerful man, or his muscles in less perfect

training, both he and his burden would have been swept down into the black seething water below. As I have said, the tide was rising fast, and the waves were swirling up and dashing their foam over Robbie's head. The lantern had been extinguished, and swept down into the water when Mr. Rose fell, so that every footstep was taken in intense, blinding darkness, and had to be felt for cautiously. At last the corner was reached; and as Robbie rested against the more sheltered side of the wall, and wiped the perspiration which, in spite of the cold bath he had just had, was streaming from his face, he gave utterance to a very fervid 'Thank the Lord!'

Ailie was standing just where he had left her, but not alone. Mercy had followed her, and had folded her arms round her for shelter. So they had both stood during those long minutes, minutes that seemed like ages, and were counted by heart-beats of fear and anguish.

It was impossible to hear anything in that war of wind and sea, and they had strained their ears in vain for the sound of footsteps; but as Robbie passed he brushed close to them, and Ailie put out her hand and caught his sleeve.

'Robbie! Where is my father? Is he safe?'

'He is here, Ailie,' he answered, soberly enough, for the burden he carried was so still and heavy,

that he could hardly tell whether it was dead or living.

She passed her hand down his arm, and felt that he carried something.

'Oh, Robbie! what is it?' she cried in terror.

'We'll take him into the house, my Ailie. Maybe he is only stunned.'

He was carried into the bright parlour, all aglow with fire and lamp-light still, and Robbie laid him on the sofa. There was an ugly gash on his temple, where the wave had knocked his head against the stone bulwark; but when Robbie laid his hand over the heart, it still beat.

'I must carry him upstairs to bed,' said Robbie, promptly, 'and then I'll go for the doctor. No one else can get along the road to-night. And I daren't leave him in those cold, wet clothes.'

He carried him up to his room, and did all that was necessary. Very tenderly he handled him, the man who had hated him so only a little while before, and who was now so utterly dependent on him.

The doctor came, and he and Robbie watched by the bedside all night. Towards morning Mr. Rose recovered from his swoon, but only to mutter feebly, and toss his head from side to side.

Robbie took Ailie out of the room, and brought her down to the parlour, cold and cheerless now, in

the grey morning light, except for the fire which Mercy had taken care to tend.

'Ailie, my own one,' he said, 'you must trust to me now. You are not fit to be with him, you must leave him to me. I will nurse him through whatever is coming, as carefully as if he were indeed the father I hope he will be, if we all live. Will you trust me, my little Ailie?'

She looked up into the brown face, so true and earnest, into the blue eye, serene and stedfast. He looked a man to trust, to lean upon in sickness and in health, in joy and sorrow, in life and to death.

With a sob she leaned her face on his breast. 'Yes, Robbie, I can trust you, now and always. But you must let me help too?' she added beseechingly.

'Yes, you'll help, as much as is good for you.'

Then he gave her to Mercy to take care of; she was very fragile still, poor child.

And for many weeks Robbie watched faithfully by the bed where Mr. Rose lay, in the alternate raving and unconsciousness of a brain fever.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### GEORGE DESMOND'S LEGACY.

MEANWHILE the winter, which had been so stormy at home, had passed in the East with terrible severity. The sufferings of that time have become matter of history now. And it makes our hearts ache still to read the long lists of killed and wounded, names which are all, but a few, forgotten. Still more, perhaps, do we grieve to read of the sufferings of those who, without the passing notice of names printed for their countrymen to read, died of cold and exposure in wretched hospitals or in the deadly trenches.

Christian Osborne had got through the winter somehow, struggling with all manner of discomforts much as others did, but with greater alleviations than most. He did not make himself quite so comfortable as a more thoroughly selfish man might have done in the circumstances; indeed, the best traits of his character came out during that winter.

He was always giving up his bed to some one who was sick or tired, and giving away his blankets to those who had none. All sorts of warm clothing he gave away to men who were badly off, till he left himself with hardly more than he carried on his back. He was always ready, too, when provisions were short, to share with others if he happened to be better off than they. Neither did he shrink from going into dangerous places, and he feared the Russian shells and balls as little as the soldiers did. By his good temper, and still more by his generosity and unmistakeable pluck, he quickly became a general favourite, and gathered round him a pleasant circle of friends. But none of them were to him what George Desmond was. He had had rather a sharp attack of cholera in January; and Captain Desmond had nursed him through it as devotedly as a brother could have done, and as few brothers are capable of doing. And since then the bond between the two men had grown stronger than ever.

At last, after truant fine days, which came to cheer the camp with hope of spring, followed by a return of cold, and frost, and biting winds, spring really came. Bright sunshine poured down on the rows of tents, warming back invalids into life, and making the hearts of strong men glad. A flush of green came over the hills, and some tender blades of grass

even tried to force themselves through the hard-trodden ground. Fruit-trees, still standing about deserted homesteads, burst into blossom, and into the camp came plentiful supplies of fresh meat and vegetables. The soldiers, relieved from the pressure of actual suffering, recovered their spirits; and while passing through the camp, Christian often heard rough manly voices trolling out old songs and choruses that had been long silent.

On one of those sweet spring days he and George Desmond strolled together out of the camp. Without intending it, they walked in the same direction which Mr. Osborne had taken when he came unexpectedly on the little prayer-meeting. The place was silent now, except for the musical noise of a streamlet that ran foaming down the ravine.

'Do you remember this place?' said Captain Desmond, stopping suddenly.

'Yes; I saw you first there. After all, what a little while ago it is; and yet it seems, somehow, as if we must have been boys together! A man doesn't make many friends after he has turned thirty, George.'

'I am only twenty-five,' said the other, smiling.

A fine blue sky was overhead, with white clouds sailing slowly across it. They sat down on a couple of stones close to the side of the little rivulet, and Christian amused himself by pitching pebbles into it.

'To be sure,' he said, 'I forgot you were so young. A mere boy compared to me.'

'Nonsense.'

'I assure you, I feel old enough at this moment to be your great-grandfather. But then I'm one of the people who grow old quickly. Now you will be always young. At sixty you will be quite a juvenile old fellow.'

Captain Desmond laughed a laugh very full of boyish glee. 'There is a good deal in the feeling, you know. In spring something of childhood always comes back to me — the same sort of feeling I used to have when I went primrose-hunting with my sisters. I say, Christian,' he went on, a strangely yearning expression coming over his face, 'doesn't this weather make you think of home? I could almost find it in my heart to be homesick.'

'It must be a comfort to have any home to be sick for,' said Christian rather gloomily.

'Have you not?'

'Well—not properly speaking. I'm a citizen of the world, you know.'

Captain Desmond looked at him, and shook his head slightly.

'Don't look at me in dumb reproach, man,' said Mr. Osborne. 'Say what you want to say.'

'Are you not tired of my preaching?' asked George, with one of his beautiful smiles.

'You hardly give me enough of it to tire me. You were going to say, just now, the world is a poor place to be a citizen of. Well, I know it. But supposing it is the best one can get?'

'But it is not. There is another city you might have the freedom of, if you would.'

Christian was silent. 'You would make such a grand Christian, old fellow,' said George. 'I never say your name without thinking of it.'

'That name? It seems to me like a mockery.'

'It will not always.'

He rose and looked up at the bright sky. 'After all, home is not far off,' he said gently.

With what bitter pangs of regret Mr. Osborne remembered afterwards the smile in the clear eyes as he said those words!

As they walked back, Captain Desmond spoke of his English home. He described with tender enthusiasm the old grey house, surrounded by its parks and gardens, and with a background of wood, where he hoped in autumn to go nutting again.

'We shall have finished off the Russians by that time, you know,' he said with one of his boyish laughs.

Then he was silent for a little, and when he spoke again his tone was serious. 'I should like to see it again, and those at home, if God wills. But the other home is as dear to me, Christian; and if it

is his will that I should go there instead, I am ready.'

Christian glanced at his face, and he saw that, with all the grace of round boyish outline and colouring, it was that of a soldier, calm, resolute, and courageous.

They parted. Christian went to his tent to write letters, and he was so occupied all day as not to be able to see Captain Desmond again. He knew that at night he was to command one of the outposts, and he half formed a resolution to ride out in that direction early next morning.

He was tired that night, and slept more soundly than usual. He heard nothing, though he knew afterwards that firing must have been going on. Very early, while the dawn was just breaking in the east, he was roused by some one hastily entering his tent, and opening his eyes, he saw gay young Harry Moore's face all wet with tears.

'What is it?' he cried out, starting up.

'George Desmond—he is shot—they are carrying him to his tent.'

Christian groaned aloud, and hurried away out into the grey morning outside. A little way off, he met the sorrowful procession—half a dozen men, who walked with bent heads, carrying something that lay very still on a stretcher. Christian looked eagerly at the white face, living still, though death was plainly written there.

'George,' he almost moaned, as he bent over him; but there was no answer. They carried him into his tent, and laid him down tenderly on the hard, narrow couch. The men sobbed like children, as, one by one, they turned to take a last look of that dear face before they went away.

The doctor came hurrying in.

'He is shot through the lungs,' he said, after a rapid examination. 'He can't live more than an hour or two.' And then he had to hurry off again, to help others where help might be of some avail.

George Desmond had made many friends, as one so frank and gentle could hardly fail to do, and they came now, with noiseless steps and sad faces, to look a farewell to him. Even in that camp, where death was so common, the loss of this pure, brave spirit was felt to be no common one, and many a man felt as if he had lost a brother. But through all the tide of comers and goers, Christian kept his seat at his friend's head, and no one questioned his right to be there. It was known that the friendship between those two had been peculiarly deep and close.

He sat with his face hidden in his hands, and no one spoke to him. There was a terrible tightness across his heart, and the veins in his temples throbbed; but he could not shed a tear. With dry, aching eyes, he looked at the beautiful young face,—beautiful still in its marble whiteness and stillness.

The long, gold-tinged eyelashes lay softly on the rounded cheeks; one of the rings of fair hair had fallen over his forehead.

At last, about eleven in the forenoon, he moved slightly; Christian bent over him and met the first look from his large blue eyes.

'Are you in much pain?' he whispered.

'No. Water.' His voice was very low, and there was a strange hoarseness about it. Christian moistened his lips. Then he gave one of his beautiful smiles. 'Don't be vexed; I'm going home.' Christian could only hide his face.

George moved his arm a little towards his breast.

'What is it, dear old fellow? Does it pain you? Can I help you at all?'

'There was—a Testament—here.'

Christian gently put his hand into an inner pocket and drew out the book. The blood had soaked through the under-clothing, and its boards were wet with dark red patches.

'Keep it—read.' His eyes asked for a promise, and Christian gave it solemnly.

Then he tried to give him a message for those at home; but even while he spoke, the blood came rushing into his mouth, staining his pale lips. He gave his friend one pleading look, with a last effort pointed upwards, and so died. And Christian felt as if his heart would break with anguish.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### 'OUT OF THE DEPTHS.'

HE went out of the tent where his dead friend lay. Outside the sun was shining in a sky as blue as yesterday's had been, and its brightness sickened him. Nature is so cruel in her beauty, and smiles so pitilessly into the face of our sorrow.

'Does God sit up there in heaven,' he asked himself bitterly, 'with the same eternal calm on his face, while we suffer down here?'

His whole nature was in revolt, his heart was full of reproach. We have, most of us, passed through such seasons, I think; times when the tenderness of God disappears from us, when God himself, as He really is, is blotted out of our heaven, and we see only a cruel, irresistible fate, which crushes our hearts with its iron hand, while it wears an everlasting smile on its face.

That was one of the most terrible days which

Christian Osborne ever spent in his life. He remembered it afterwards with awe; it was as if the blackness of darkness had come down on him, and all the waves and billows passed over his soul. In truth, his soul had been slowly growing up towards the light for months past. It was as if he had been carrying about with him the germs of a new life; and now the fierce pangs which come before the new life can be born, had seized hold of him. I do not say that it is so in all cases. With some, that new life comes gradually, almost imperceptibly, like the dawn of a new morning; but with others it is born with agony of soul, and strong crying and tears. Perhaps the strongest natures are those which suffer most; God is merciful, and does not inflict such pain on those whom He knows to be unable to bear it.

Christian went to his tent, carrying George Desmond's last gift in his hand. He cared for it, as yet, only because it was his friend's legacy to him, and those stains on the cover made it a sacred thing to him. He had yet to learn that, long before, another Friend had also bequeathed it to him, and that every page of it bore the marks of his wounds.

He told his servant that he wanted to be alone, and that no one was to be admitted; and all day long he sat on his couch, or paced the narrow limits of his tent, while the tempest raged within him.

God has so made us, that a real, intense doubting

and distrusting of his goodness is very terrible to us. If we go down to the foundations of our hearts and see what lies there, I think we shall find it to be a belief in the righteousness of God. And when that belief is shaken, there is an upheaving of all that rests upon it, and our souls are shaken as by an earthquake.

Towards evening he became wearied with thought, and yet as incapable of ceasing to think as he would have been of stopping the beating of the waves. Then his eye caught the little Testament, which, on coming in, he had laid on the table. He remembered his promise, and he sat down beside the table, and drew the book towards him. The stains on its cover were dry now; and as he looked at them, his heart was full of pain. He would have given much to be able to weep, for his eyes were hot and dry, as they had been all day; but his sorrow was still of that bitterest kind to which no such relief will come. Then he began to read, the idea in his mind being chiefly that anything was better than thinking any more. It was a long time since he had read that book, and its words came to him with more of freshness than they can come to those to whom it is more familiar. He had begun at the beginning, and he read straight through two of the Gospels. And as he read, there grew upon him, as there had never done before, a conception of the life of Christ. That divine Man suddenly sprung into being for him, not

merely as a historical personage, or a name to which a certain reverence was to be attached, but as a living truth. The extraordinary completeness and consistency of the whole life, from its beginning in the stable, to its close upon the cross—its uniqueness, standing alone as it does among all other lives ever lived in the world, dawned upon him for the first time. And along with this, he was profoundly impressed by the nobility of Christ's character, and by the exalted philosophy of his teaching. Never had the wisdom and righteousness of the words He spoke been suggested to him with the same force.

And yet, with all this, it was more his intellect that was impressed than his heart. He felt, with an enthusiasm of belief, that the Man he was reading about was the greatest hero that ever lived; that his life, in its noble simplicity, its grand truthfulness, its utter self-sacrifice, was the only perfectly heroic life which had ever been lived. But as yet his soul did not receive Christ as its Saviour.

It was late at night, and he was very tired. The camp was silent, except for the distant firing of an occasional gun, and the lamp by which he had been reading threw a dim light on the interior of his tent. He leaned his arms on the rough wooden box which served him for a table, and bending his head on it, he so fell asleep. And then there came to him one of those dreams, so extremely vivid that they

may be called visions, of which we have more than one record. Such a dream as came to John Newton, and influenced his whole future life.

He was still in his tent, sitting by his rough table, with the lamp and the blood-stained Testament beside him, but he was no longer alone. For, looking across the table, he saw, standing at the other side of it, a figure which he at once recognised. The face was calm and very pale, the head crowned with thorns. And the eyes—those large, pathetic eyes—were turned full upon him, with a look of yearning love and sorrow. As he gazed, awe-stricken, the appearance of the figure slowly changed. The dark garments became luminous, the face radiant, the eyes more piercing, and from every thorn-point of the crown shot a ray of light. Then the arms were raised, and extended in the attitude of benediction. Christian stretched his hands towards it, with a sudden emotion of yearning, and a cry on his lips of 'Jesus! Lord!'

Then he awoke. The tent was just as it had been before, and he was alone; but his face was all wet with tears, and his heart was as the heart of a little child. He knelt down, sobbing, but very few words came. Only the cry of a new-born life, that stretched its arms towards the Father.

Then, utterly exhausted, he went to bed, and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A TREACHEROUS SHOT.

THE new birth. To be born at once into a world of love, and life, and light; to enter it, not a wailing infant, but a full-grown soul, with faculties all keen and matured; to realize at once the closeness of relationship between one's self and God; to come out of the loneliness which every man experiences who has not yet recognised that relationship, and all the others which spring from it, and enter into the great family of which God is Father, and Christ the elder Brother; to feel that one is no longer a solitary, conscious atom, standing alone upon a point of time, with the terrible unknown all about one, but one of a great brotherhood, linked close to God by the divine and human Brother at its head,—those are some of the things which these three words imply.

When Christian Osborne awoke, with that strange peace in his heart, some of those thoughts came to

him. The whole invisible life, so long a mystery to him, stretched around him, unexplored as yet in great measure, but unseen no longer.

That day was a very curious one in his soul's history, unlike any that went before, or came after. For, together with the great joy that had come to him, he was experiencing a keen human anguish.

He went, early in the morning, to the tent where his dead friend lay. The beautiful face was very placid now, with that awful calm upon it which our bitterest sorrow fails to stir. As he knelt beside the bed, and took his last long look at the face he had learned to love so dearly, he could hardly have told whether regret or joy were strongest in his heart. It would have gladdened *him* so intensely to know that his prayers had been answered, and that light had dawned on his friend's soul at last. And there he lay, still and silent, in the presence of that very joy which he had so longed for.

'Oh, Geordie! If you could but have known, if you could but have known!' Christian sobbed out.

And then, with his new-born insight into unseen things, he felt that, wherever George was, he did know, and was glad.

They buried him in the hillside burying-ground, to which so many English hearts still turn. There was a little slab put up over the grave, with the name and date carved on it; and there, far away

from the English home he so loved, the dust of George Desmond waits, 'in hope of a glorious resurrection.'

As Christian Osborne turned away from the grave, he felt that a new life, new outwardly as well as inwardly, was about to begin for him. For it is as impossible that the new-born child should refuse to breathe the air of the world into which it has been born, as that the new-born soul should fail to exhibit some symptoms of its vitality. He felt very like a child just beginning to walk, afraid to take a single step alone. 'If Geordie had been here, he would have guided me,' he thought, with that keen sense of missing which is so hard to bear. And then, again, he remembered how George himself had always kept firm hold of God's hand, and leaving all the burden of guiding to Him, had been content to follow where He led.

With much diffidence, and many failings of heart, Christian took, as far as possible, George Desmond's empty place. When his own duties allowed him, he went to the hospital, and though he often felt tongue-tied in presence of the sick and dying, and hardly dared to say a word of his own to them, he could read God's words, and in so doing he often found that he carried the invisible talisman which he had so wondered about of old.

But before he had much opportunity of doing

such work, he was called away from it. When we are most of all anxious to do, God very often takes us by the hand, and leads us aside to some quiet place, where we can only suffer.

In the beginning of April, there was one of those skirmishes, a slight affair in itself, but resulting in some loss of life, more particularly among the enemy. Now it so happened that, on the morning following this *sortie*, Mr. Osborne was early out, and on his way back to his tent he met one of his friends, a young doctor, of whom he had seen a good deal during the winter. It was a clear, bright morning, with a slight refreshing breeze blowing in from the sea; and under the sunshine, with their faces turned up grimly to the blue sky, lay the wounded and dead Russians. Christian had turned with Dr. Errick, when he had learnt his errand, and tried to give him what help he could—following him about with lint and bandages, supporting the head of some poor, writhing, groaning wretch, and answering the feeble cry for water by holding it to the parched lips. It was sickening work; I do not know whether, a month ago, Christian would have done it. He had never been wanting in courage, but, till lately, it had hardly been of the kind which would have led him to such a place as this, where a good deal of endurance was required, without the spur and excitement of conscious danger. He be-

came sick and faint once or twice, his nerves not being seasoned as the doctor's were.

'You had better go, Osborne,' said Dr. Errick, glancing at his face, and seeing how white it had become. 'You are not hardened enough for this yet.'

'I don't see what that has to do with it,' answered Christian calmly. 'I shall certainly stay if I am of any use to you. One has no business to shrink from things merely because they are disagreeable.'

A new doctrine this for Mr. Osborne, as Dr. Errick would have thought, had he known him in the old days, when pleasantness was the chief end of his life.

They had got a good many of the wounded off the field, and the sad morning's work seemed to be drawing to a close, when Christian noticed a Russian soldier, who had dragged himself almost out of sight under a bush. He took the can of water to him; and hearing from the man's moans that he was still alive, though badly wounded, he knelt beside him, and raised his head gently from the ground. At that instant he heard Dr. Errick's voice shouting to him, 'Take care;' but it was too late. The wounded man had drawn a pistol from under him, and with a look of intense hatred fired it full at Christian's head. Fortunately his aim was unsteady: the pistol swerved, and the bullet struck Mr. Os-

borne's arm a little below the shoulder. It all happened in a few seconds: one moment he was bending over the man, the next there was a blinding flash, a deafening report, and he had a sensation as of a red-hot bar of iron running into his arm. Then Dr. Errick was at his side, cursing at the 'Russian hound' in no measured terms.

'Hush!' said Christian faintly. 'Don't do that, Errick; you hurt yourself more than him.'

'The treacherous dog!' said the doctor, gnashing his teeth.

Christian heard no more, for when his arm was touched, he fainted. They carried him to his tent, and laid him down on his couch. The story spread through the camp of how Osborne had been shot while giving water to a wounded Russian, and there was no want either of sympathy or indignation. But Christian knew nothing of his popularity: for many days he hung between life and death, sometimes lying still and unconscious, sometimes only speaking in the broken mutterings of fever. He did not want for nurses. Night after night his friends took it in turn to watch him, and Dr. Errick gave him as much time and attention as he could spare. Other doctors saw him too, but no medical skill could save his arm. The bone was found to be so shattered that amputation was necessary.

At last the scale turned, and the doctors said that

he would live. Then came days of weakness and pain, during which he thought he would have been content to die. God seemed very near to him in those days; he learned many a lesson while he lay there with closed eyes, while the guns of the bombardment of Sebastopol boomed all day outside his tent. Inside, there was an atmosphere of peace, which not even the roar of the cannon could disturb.

At last, maimed, and white, and weak, and bent like an old man, Christian Osborne crept on board a homeward-bound steamer, and said good-bye to the Crimea, the land of his new birth, and of George Desmond's grave.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### ROBBIE'S INVESTMENT.

WHEN Mr. Rose recovered consciousness, the first thing that attracted his attention was the pattern of his bed curtains. They were old-fashioned chintz things, with big faded roses running all over them in a rambling sort of way; and his eye followed the branches up and down, and tried to find out where all those convolutions led to. Then he noticed a large wooden press with doors, which stood near the foot of his bed. It was painted brown, and had black knobby handles on it; and slowly he began to recognise the shape of the doors, and to count the number of handles, and then to remember what was inside of it. That big press was the starting-point from which he travelled in his voyage of recollection. It took him a long time to remember everything, up to the scramble along the top of his bulwark on that wild night, after which nothing but a horror of dark-

ness remained to him. He fell asleep in the middle of that gathering together of thought and memory, and woke again to resume his feelings after recollection. It was evening when he awoke the second time. Outside, the sun was dipping behind purple hills, and long red rays were streaming across a calm, glittering sea, and shining in at the window of the sick-room. Mr. Rose watched the red reflection on the floor, and the cross made by the shadow of the window frame; and then, raising his eyes, he saw a man sitting in an arm-chair near the bed. He was dressed in a loose blue jacket, such as sailors wear; his face was ruddy and sunburnt; and his steady blue eyes were looking away out of the window at the shimmering, golden sea. Mr. Rose knew that strong, calm face, and his brow contracted. Presently the door opened, and Ailie glided softly in. Mr. Rose saw Robbie's face grow bright, as from an inward illumination; then he saw him rise and go to Ailie.

'Have you been resting, dear?' he heard him say.

'Yes. How has he been?'

'Sleeping very quietly. I think it is a healing sleep.'

'His eyes are open; he sees us,' said Ailie hurriedly; and then she came quickly towards the bed, and bent over him. 'Father, you know me now, don't you?'

'Yes, I know you.' The voice was very weak, but there was the old hard ring in it. 'Why is he here?' he asked, his eyes glaring towards Robbie with an expression that was by no means amiable.

'Dear father,' she answered in a low voice, with lips that quivered a little, 'he has been here all the time. He has nursed you.'

Mr. Rose turned his head so as to put his face into shadow, and lay still without speaking.

Ailie left the room, and returned presently, carrying a cup of soup on a tray. 'You must take this, father,' she said gently.

Then Robbie stepped forward and raised him tenderly with one strong arm, while with the other he deftly arranged the pillows at his back so as to give him the needed support. Ailie sat on the bed and fed him with dainty spoonfuls of soup, and soothed him into good humour in spite of himself. He was laid down again among the pillows, to fall into another long sleep.

So some days passed, while he slowly gained strength. Now it is hardly in human nature to go on hating a person who lifts you in his arms, who feeds you and tends you, and watches you night and day with unwearied gentleness and patience. Mr. Rose used to waken in the night and look across the room to a temporary couch where Robbie lay. A very slight movement or low word

was sufficient to call him to his side; and then the grave, resolute face would be bending over him, and the strong, tender hands doing all for him that he needed.

Certainly, at the end of his first week of convalescence, Mr. Rose no longer hated Robbie M'Intosh.

He did not talk to him much. He was naturally taciturn, and his weakness made him more so; but he learned to call on him without scruple for whatever service he needed. On the first day on which he was able to be moved from his bed, and propped up in a great chair with pillows, looking very grim and quaint with his white face and unshaven beard, he began to question Robbie.

'Was there much damage done that night?' he asked. It was the first time he had alluded to the storm in any way.

Robbie had been going about the room, putting things to rights in his tidy sailor fashion. He had sent Ailie out to walk with Mercy, so that he and Mr. Rose were alone together. He had been expecting a question of the sort for some time, and he knew that the best thing possible was to give a straightforward answer to it. Nothing provokes sick people more than to feel that things are concealed from them. He came behind Mr. Rose's chair, and laid his hand on the back of it.

'There was a good deal of mischief done. We could hardly expect it to have been less on such a night. The east corner of the building was thrown down, and the machines next it were damaged a good deal. Some of the goods were wet with salt water; that was about all, I think.'

'All!' groaned Mr. Rose. 'Enough too.'

'It might have been worse, sir,' said Robbie quietly.

Mr. Rose was silent, looking out at the window. 'There were contracts on hand,' he said, after a little; 'of course they will need to be broken. They were to be finished in—— What day of the month is this?'

'The 15th of April.'

'Nearly six weeks lost. The goods were to have been ready by the middle of next month; and the mill will hardly be in a state to commence work again by that time.'

Robbie hesitated for two minutes, and then spoke clearly and decisively. 'Mr. Rose, I heard something of those contracts, and knowing that a good deal must depend on the completing of them, and as you were quite unable to give any directions, I ventured to take some responsibility on myself. The mill is working again, sir.'

'Working!' Then he was silent, listening. The hum of his factory, accompanied by the dash of the

water against the bulwark, had been sounding in his ears for so many years, that, as is common in such cases, he had ceased to hear either sound, unless by a special effort. Now, when he did listen, he heard the well-known hum, like the sound of a huge hive of bees. He turned and looked at Robbie, frowning, as was his wont. 'How comes that?' he asked in his sternest and abruptest manner.

'I hope I have done right, sir,' said Robbie, meeting his eyes boldly. 'If not, I can only say I did it for the best. I thought it would be a terrible pity to let all the work stand till you were able to be about again. It would have lost so much time; and your foreman spoke to me of those contracts. I sent for the proper workmen, and set them to work immediately. The wall is built up again, and the bulwark repaired. The machines are in order, and the mill opened a week ago.'

Mr. Rose turned away, and looked out at the window for a good many minutes this time. He could hardly feel angry, and yet he was not altogether pleased that this man, whom he had determined to keep at arm's length, should have stepped in and managed his affairs for him. Managed them cleverly too, to all appearance, when they were in a particularly critical state.

'Have I done wrong, sir?' asked Robbie at last.

Mr. Rose was, take him altogether, a just man;

and his sense of justice forced him to say, 'No, you have not done wrong.' But it was said reluctantly.

'I have done something more then,' said Robbie; 'I have engaged extra hands, and put on all possible pressure. The contracts will be all right, I hope, sir.'

There was no answer at all to this. It was certainly not very gracious, but Robbie had not worked for thanks. Mr. Rose hardly spoke again that evening, but was, as Ailie privately told Mercy, after they had come in, 'as grumpy as possible.'

'I have told your father about the mill,' Robbie said to her when they were next alone together. It was a lovely evening. The sun had set, and a rosy flush lingered over the hills, throwing them out in clear outlines of purple, while a young crescent moon climbed slowly up into the deep blue overhead. Ailie was sitting on the low wall above the bulwark, against which little innocent-looking waves lapped softly, as if they were quite incapable of doing any mischief.

'What did he say?' she asked, looking up at him as he stood beside her, straight and strong, with his steady face turned towards the sea.

'He said very little. I don't know that he was much pleased. I didn't do it expecting that, Ailie. I thought it was the rightest thing to do at the time.'

Ailie smiled. 'Yes; you always do think about

the "rightest" thing, as you call it, Robbie. You are a very safe man ; safe to trust to, I mean.'

'Do you think so, darling?' he said fondly. 'I am very glad. I think you may trust me, at any rate.'

'I do,' she answered in a low voice; 'fully, fearlessly.'

'My own love,' he whispered, passing his hand tenderly over her brown hair. 'I think that, while I have this trust, I can bear anything.'

He did not tell her that he had a good deal of anxiety to bear just then. His prompt action had, in the meantime, left him a very poor man.

Mr. Rose waited till Robbie and he were alone together again, before he broached business matters. Then he spoke abruptly, plunging at once into the middle of the subject.

'How have you been able to carry on the mill? What have you done for money?'

'I had a little of my own, sir. Enough to go on with,' said Robbie quietly.

'And the repairs?'

'They are paid for also.'

'It must have cost a good deal.'

'I think it has been done as reasonably as possible. When you wish it, and are strong enough, I will lay the accounts before you.'

'Where did you get so much money?' asked Mr. Rose, bending his brows on Robbie suspiciously.

'Part of it—a very little—was left to me with my cottage and garden. The rest I have worked for and saved since.' He spoke a little proudly, as he had a right to speak.

Mr. Rose pondered the matter in silence. With him this statement of Robbie's, which he saw no reason to doubt, weighed more strongly in the young man's favour than almost any other could have done. None knew better than he what rigid economy, what self-denying patience, must have been necessary before such a sum, small to him, but large to a man in Robbie's position, could have been accumulated.

'And you have lent this money to me,' he said presently; 'or rather, you have invested it in my property, without security of any kind? That was imprudent—very. Supposing I disapprove of what you have done, which is very likely, you can hardly compel me to pay the money. You have nothing to show for it, not a scrap of my writing.'

'I will trust you for that, sir,' Robbie answered calmly, though his face flushed a little.

'What was your object in saving this money? What did you intend doing with it?'

'I meant to buy a schooner with it.'

'And supposing, as I have said, that I disapprove of your management, and consider that I don't fairly owe you the money,—what then?'

'Then,' he answered slowly, 'then I must begin

the world again, sir. I'll have a fairer start this time. I know my profession now, and am nearer the top of it. And all that money was not saved off my wages. I have a little business connection of my own,—men with whom I have traded in different parts of the world, and who know me.'

Mr. Rose looked at him furtively. There was something in the resolute face, in the steady blue eyes, that told of a spirit that could bear reverses, that could rise unconquered after failure, and struggle up to success at last. He looked like a man who would 'get on;' and getting on was a part of Mr. Rose's religion.

A week after, the master went out, pale and weak, but fully himself again, to visit his mill. He went all over it, in spite of fatigue, and was forced to confess to himself that it had never been in better order. The repairs were perfectly satisfactory, and appeared as if no storms could do any further damage. The goods for the contract were in progress, and in a fair way of being finished in time. The whole place looked as if a master's eye had been over it.

'That Mr. M'Intosh *is* a quick one to take up things,' said the foreman, an Englishman from one of the great manufacturing towns. 'Why, he understood the working of them machines in no time. And he gives his orders out clear and square, like as

he was on board ship.' The fact was, that Robbie, with his clear head and quick common sense, had stepped in when the man had been utterly perplexed by two such calamities as the damage to the mill and the master's illness coming together.

He had relieved him, by taking the command into his own hands, of a disagreeable responsibility; and perhaps, also, the fact of his having had money enough in his possession to carry on the business, obtained for him a greater measure of respect. But no one who knew Robbie M'Intosh long, could fail, whatever their amount of liking might be, of at least most decidedly respecting him.

That same evening Mr. Rose demanded the accounts. They were ready for him. He was able to sit in Ailie's parlour now, and he and Robbie spent the evening in the midst of figures, while Ailie sat opposite to them, silently working and glancing wistfully at the two faces every now and then.

Robbie had just the sort of mind whose capacity for figures amounts almost to a genius. Anything that required clear, quick *seeing*, was thoroughly in his line. And of all others, this talent was the one most likely to find favour in Mr. Rose's eyes. Gifts of imagination he despised, if a man can truly despise anything which it is impossible he can at all comprehend; but this hard, clear capacity for seeing

to the bottom of any calculation at once, seemed to him the most useful faculty in existence. And he could not fail to see that the young man beside him had it in a remarkable degree. It was, in fact, this clear vision of Robbie's which had enabled him to rise so quickly in his profession above the heads of other men, who had started with seemingly equal chances. The same clear-headedness that made him a good arithmetician and mathematician, made him also a skilled navigator, and gave him that most valuable of all gifts for practical men,—the faculty of seeing at once what was best to be done in case of sudden emergency.

Poor Ailie, who, like many persons of a poetical temperament, had an utter incapacity for figures, and to whom the commonest sums were inscrutable problems, listened with feelings akin to terror to the examination which Robbie was being put through. He caught her wide, wistful, brown eyes once or twice, and smiled at her encouragingly; but it was not till she began to discern through all the gruffness of her father's questions, that he was really satisfied, that the feeling of terror changed to one of pride. In fact, to her, those quick, correct replies of Robbie's seemed little short of miraculous.

At last Mr. Rose pushed away the papers, and leant back in his chair, silent and wearied. Robbie gathered the accounts together and sorted them

tidily into packets, each after its kind; an action not unnoted by Mr. Rose's watchful eyes.

'You have the making of a business-man in you,' he said abruptly; and he spoke no more that night. There was no word either of praise or thanks to the man who had done so much for him; but, as Robbie shrewdly thought, there was no blame either.

After that, Mr. Rose went back to his old habits, his days in the mill and counting-house, and his devotion to his big account-books. But he knew, though from his iron will no one else could have guessed it, that he was not quite so strong as he had been before his accident. Ailie indeed noticed that the evenings spent beside her in the parlour were more frequent, and occasionally he would stretch himself on the hair-cloth sofa and sleep for an hour, which was quite a new thing. Robbie had given up sleeping in his room, and all things had returned to their old footing, with one exception.

Robbie came and went as he chose, and no one found fault with him. Mr. Rose saw him take Ailie out to walk with him, and came in on them while he sat reading to her in the parlour, but he never opened his lips on the subject. Only once or twice he sent him on business errands to some of the more southern towns where he had dealings, and Robbie felt that, in his harsh, unbending way, he trusted him.

At last, one afternoon when Robbie was alone in his cottage, he was surprised by seeing Mr. Rose stooping to unfasten the latch of his garden gate. He walked up the path, glancing at the neat garden on each side, and knocked at the door. Robbie let him in without making any remark, and brought out a chair for him in as matter-of-fact a way as if he had been in the habit of stepping in every day of his life. Then he waited.

'M'Intosh,' he said, plunging at once, as usual, into what he had come to say, without any attempt at preface, 'I have a proposal to make to you.'

Robbie merely bowed.

'You have good business faculties; you would master the details of any business in a short time. I am getting old, and am not so strong as I once was. I would be the better of a young, strong man as partner. Will you accept the position?'

Robbie felt for an instant as if the room were turning round with him; then the mist passed from before his eyes, and he saw clearly. But it was some minutes before he spoke, and his voice was slightly unsteady.

'You have made me a noble offer, Mr. Rose; such a chance comes to few men; but you must forgive me, sir, if I hesitate before accepting it.'

Mr. Rose knit his brows. 'I didn't expect you to accept at once. Take a week to think of it.' And

he rose and went away as suddenly as he had come. But he had left a bank cheque on the table; and when Robbie looked at it, he saw it was for the full amount expended by him.

At the end of a week he went to the office.

'Are you at liberty, sir? Can I speak to you?'

'Go on.'

Robbie stood by the window looking out at a shining, tossing, blue sea, with eyes that loved it. 'Mr. Rose,' he said, 'your offer is a very generous one, but yet I fear I cannot take it. If you insist upon it as a condition—' he paused slightly, and Mr. Rose understood perfectly what he meant—'I will become your partner, and will try to do my duty conscientiously. Otherwise, that is, if you leave me my free choice in the matter, I will stick by the profession I have chosen. I love it, and I have no doubt of ultimately rising in it. A man does best at what his heart is in, sir.'

Mr. Rose was silent. He was bitterly disappointed, but he did not choose to show it.

'What do you purpose doing?' he asked at length.

'I intend buying a schooner, sir, and trading with it.'

'I won't have my daughter's husband the master of a little coasting schooner,' said Mr. Rose decisively.

'Then you make the other a condition?' asked Robbie, looking up eagerly.

'No; I didn't say that,' he answered in his gruffest manner. He went back to his books, and Robbie was going away when he said, 'You will not do anything without consulting me, M'Intosh.'

'Certainly not, sir,' said Robbie promptly. After that, things went on much as before. Robbie had several opportunities of getting good berths for long voyages; but Mr. Rose always sternly vetoed his accepting them, without assigning any reason, and the young man felt it was best to wait patiently. In truth, waiting was only too easy, while days could be spent by Ailie's side wandering about shore and hillside, and drinking long draughts of her sweetness and beauty, while a lovely spring glided into a brilliant summer.

At last, one evening when he had been reading to her out in the garden till twilight fell, they saw the post-boy come along the road and turn into the office. Ailie was sitting on the low wall above the bulwark, a favourite position of hers, and Robbie leant against it, a book in his hand. Behind them the sea lay in glittering blue and gold, and the golden light still lingered behind the western hills. They looked at the post-boy carelessly, not dreaming that anything he brought could make much difference to them.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Rose came towards them, holding a large blue envelope in his hand. He held it out to Ailie.

'There, child,' he said, almost tenderly for him, 'that is something for you; you can give it to anybody you like.'

She opened it wonderingly. It was the captaincy of one of those grand merchant Indiamen, that are more like floating palaces than anything else.

'Robbie!' she exclaimed below her breath, and put it into his hand.

Then she put her arms about her stern father's neck, and kissed him over and over again.

'There, there, there,' was all he said, gently pushing her away from him. But she caught a glimpse of his eyes as he turned away, and she saw that they were moist.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### CHRISTIAN'S RIGHT HAND.

MERCY LESTER had gone back some time before to Inverurquhart House. Ailie did not need her now that she had Robbie: those who are in the middle of that sweet dream of love that comes before marriage, need no one but each other. And Mrs. Lynne was complaining that Lily and Fan were fast forgetting the little they had ever learnt, so Mercy thought it best to go where she was most needed.

It was the end of April when news came of Christian Osborne's wound. One sweet spring evening, when Mrs. Lynne and Mercy were in the morning-room together, they saw the laird take the letters from the post-boy, and then he stood on the lawn reading them. His eye had caught at once the Crimean letter in a strange handwriting, and in those days people felt a cold chill strike them when they received such letters. He went slowly into the

morning-room where the two women were working and talking happily, and he sat down by his wife's side and put his arm round her.

'Louie, darling,' he said tenderly, 'I have a letter from the East here.'

Something in his voice checked the glad exclamation that rose to her lips. Mercy's work fell into her lap, and she sat like a statue looking at them.

'It is not from Christian,' went on Fred.

'Then he is hurt, or ill. Oh! Fred, give me the letter,' Mrs. Lynne cried out.

For a minute of mute, intolerable pain, Mercy sat silent, till Louisa's storm of sobs and tears broke out. 'Oh, he will die!' she kept crying. 'He'll die out there, all alone, and I'll never see him again!'

Then Mercy knew he was not dead.

Mr. Lynne raised his head from bending over his wife, and looked at her; and he knew instantly that the grief of the woman who was turning a white, still face upon him, was greater than that of her who lay sobbing on his breast. 'Louie, look at Mercy,' he said softly.

'Mercy! it was her fault, she sent him, she—' Mrs. Lynne met the dumb anguish of those wide blue eyes, and the reproaches died on her lips. With a quick impulse, she went up to the woman who was suffering more than herself, and put her

arms round her. 'Forgive me, Mercy,' she sobbed. 'I thought you didn't care.'

'The letter,' she said, almost in a whisper; and then she drew herself away from Louisa, and went upstairs with the letter in her hand, and read it in her own room, with the door locked.

I do not think that any one ever guessed what Mercy suffered during the weeks that followed, unless her husband did, after it was all over. Mr. Osborne's friend wrote often; but during all the time when Christian's life seemed to tremble in the balance, there was little to tell. At last, after summer had fairly come, and the roses were blooming in the Inverurquhart garden, came a precious little scrap from Christian himself—a few lines written in pencil, very crooked and unsteady. He was better, he said. God had spared his life, and he was coming home. Oh, he did so weary to be at home!

That was all, and over this letter Mrs. Lynne saw Mercy shed the first tears she had ever allowed to fall in any one's presence, though her pillow had often been wet enough. They were not many, for Mercy was not a woman easily moved to tears; only a few bright drops, a quick sob or two, and it was over. And then came days of waiting, during which Louisa wandered restlessly about the house, and in and out of 'Mr. Christian's room,' made

ready for him long before it possibly could be wanted. And in the end of July Mr. Lynne went to London to bring his brother home. They were to travel by sea, as being the least fatiguing method for Christian, for at that time, before the Highland Railway was opened, the journey by coach was a long one.

The day of their arrival was a very beautiful one, and Inverurquhart was looking its loveliest. From the window of Mercy's room, the bay could be seen; and all the morning Mrs. Lynne and she had sat there together, looking at the blue, gleaming water, watching for the first wreath of the steamer's smoke, as it rounded the Craigs. They hardly spoke a word to each other, only kept straining their eyes over the water, and listening to the little clock on the mantelpiece, as it chimed out quarter after quarter.

'There it is!' said Mrs. Lynne at last. And she rose to tie on her bonnet with trembling fingers. 'Will you not come?'

Mercy shook her head, which was still turned towards the window, and Mrs. Lynne kissed her, and went away. She heard the wheels of the carriage as it rolled off, and then she sat down to wait. Who has not spent such hours? Hours when the minutes seem to drop one by one, in the silence, like so many drops of life-blood; when the heart

throbs on painfully, and the breath seems to pause every now and then, and has to be recovered in long-drawn sighs; when every distant rattle of wheels on the road, every sound at the door, makes one start and tremble, till at last one grows sick and faint with mingled hope and fear.

Mercy watched the steamer glide up the blue bay, with its long streamer of smoke behind, and leaving a broad road of foamy white in its wake. She saw it stop out in the deep water, and she knew that from the pier, which she could not see, a boat would be putting off to bring the passengers on shore. Then she could bear to sit still no longer. She remembered that from the window of a little room, belonging to one of her poor friends in the town, she could overlook the pier, without herself being seen. She put on her hat, and slipped quietly down stairs, and out into the garden. She took the shortest way into the town, a path that led by the Dame's Walk, through a gate at the further end of it into a grass field, and then down one of the steep, irregular Inverurquhart streets. She hurried on, her long black dress sweeping the drooping fern leaves and long grass of the Dame's Walk as she passed. She was sure of meeting no one, for the path was little used except by people from the house. She was obliged to walk more slowly after entering the

town, though its streets were more than usually deserted that day. She passed her old home,—still hers though it was empty and shut up, and the little garden was full of weeds. She went down the street that led to the pier, and then she turned in at a low doorway, and went up a dark wooden stair. The room was empty, though the door had been left upon the latch; its occupant had gone down to the pier to see Mr. Christian Osborne come in. Mercy felt relieved as she glanced round the poor little place, and saw that no one was there; it was better that she should be alone during the next half-hour. From the window she saw right down the pier, and out to where the steamer was lying in the bay beyond. She saw, too, that the boat had already received its freight from the steamer's side, and was rowing landwards, and that quite a concourse of people were waiting for it on the pier. Mr. Osborne was a favourite with the Inverurquhart folk; through years of absence his friends there had remembered him; and besides, he was the first person who had actually come back to them from the East, to which their hearts had been so long turned.

The boat came slowly on, black against the blue water. Mercy could almost distinguish the figures in it, as the distance between it and the shore grew less; and she fancied she knew one, sitting near

the stern, wrapped in a large cloak. She saw Mrs. Lynne standing at the very furthest point of the pier, with Lily and Fan beside her, and she saw her stretch out both her hands as the boat came close to the pier. It was out of Mercy's sight then; the tide was low; and a high flight of steps had to be climbed from the water. The sailors sprang up first, and then Mr. Lynne—she knew his broad shoulders,—and then a tall figure, the sight of which made her heart leap up. An unmistakeable sound came to her ears, the people were cheering him as he walked up the pier; she saw him lift his left hand to his cap before he got into the carriage.

There was no need to wait any longer. She crept down the stairs, her heart beating fast, and was up the street and in the field again before the carriage passed.

She felt very proud and happy. She did not know whether he still thought of her as he had done before he went away; but she knew that he, the Fainéant, had come home to be received with love and honour by his townsfolk. She was safely up in her own room again before the carriage came to the door, and was quietly standing before the looking-glass smoothing her beautiful hair, when Mrs. Lynne came to look for her.

'Will you come, Mercy?' she said. 'He is asking for you.'

When Mercy turned to look at her face, she saw that it was all stained with crying. 'Ah, be good to him,' Louisa whispered as they went down together. 'He needs it.'

She did not answer. Words were impossible just then. The door of the morning-room was open, and they went in. Then she saw a tall figure rise from the sofa and come forward to meet her. She held out her hand, and it was taken by his left one. And then she saw that the right sleeve was empty, pinned across his breast. A low cry escaped her. He had not let any one tell them this. He looked into her face; it was impossible to keep it still, and her eyes were full and her lips quivering.

Without a word, he bent his head, and kissed the hand that he held. There was something so knightly in the action, that she thought immediately of the words she had spoken to him long ago, and she felt that her Bayard had come back to her.

But she could not say a word to him, she could only turn away from him to the window to hide her face.

He went back to the sofa, for he was very tired. He was stronger than when he had left the Crimea, and had grown sunburnt on the voyage, so that he did not seem so terribly wan as then, but he was not yet the strong man he had been before he went away. Only as Mercy looked at him, she saw that

an infinitely sweeter and nobler expression had come into his face. It was liker now to the boyish face that was in Mrs. Lynne's dressing-room, than it had ever been before, during her recollection.

Every one was very tender over him that day. His sister lingered about him, doing all manner of little offices for him, merely as an excuse for touching him. The children crept close to him, looking pitifully at that empty sleeve, which, for them, had something awful about it. Fred sat and looked at him and talked to him, though he had got over the newness of having him back by this time. Only Mercy sat silent in her corner, not speaking much, nor venturing to show much of the gladness she felt. She had hardly the right as yet, she thought.

Once, when Louisa was arranging a pillow for him, he said, 'Ah, Louie, I often wanted you to do that when I was ill. I used to dream of you very often, and I saw your face when I was feverish, yours and—' he looked towards Mercy, but she did not dare to look at him.

'It is so good to be here with you all,' he went on. 'I wonder what I've ever done that God should have brought me home again, when so many poor fellows—' he stopped, and put up his hand to his eyes. Louisa hid her face on the pillow beside him, sobbing.

'Come, dear, don't cry any more,' he said, after

a minute. 'Why, what a showery welcome you are giving me!'

The first thing that brought Mercy at all near him was at dinner. She was sitting next him, talking to him quietly enough now, for her peculiarly reticent nature had asserted itself, and whatever she felt was well hidden, when she noticed that the meat upon his plate was untouched, and that he was leaning back in his chair and looking at it.

'Miss Lester,' he said in a low voice, 'I'm very hungry, and I don't see how I can get any dinner unless you help me.' He was smiling, and he spoke lightly; but she felt her cheeks grow hot, and had to exercise a good deal of self-control in order to keep from crying. She stooped forward and cut it for him. 'Will that do now? Can you manage?' she asked.

'Yes, thank you. I am learning to use my left hand for all sorts of things now. At first I was nearly as helpless as a baby. But I want some one to do instead of a right hand still, you see,' he said meaningly, looking at her.

'Can I do anything else for you?' was all the answer she gave him.

'Yes, you can give me some water.' And all dinner time he kept asking her to help him in various ways, as he meant, for the present at least, to make her his right hand.

During the week which followed that first day, Mercy's life was like a dream of rest to her. It was so good to have him back again, after the months of wearying anxiety that had gone before; to watch him as he lay on Louisa's sofa, or moved about the house and garden, and to know that he was safe from all those dangers which had seemed the more terrible to the women at home, because their precise nature was necessarily vague to them. And it was hardly possible for any one who lived in the house for many days with Christian Osborne, to help noticing that a definite change had taken place in him. It was not that he said much about it, though words fell from him now and then, as they must fall from any one whose heart has been filled with the love of God. But his whole nature was softened; his old cynicism had disappeared, and there was a grave, gentle happiness about his look, that both Mercy and his sister noticed.

'Christian is changed since he went away, Mercy,' said Mrs. Lynne. 'Has he said anything about it to you?'

'Not yet; but I have seen what you mean,' answered Mercy.

She was very happy in seeing it. It did not matter so much, she told herself, whether he still cared for her as he had done or no, if he were only in a fair way to become what she knew he was

capable of being—a true and noble Christian gentleman. And something whispered to her heart that Mr. Osborne loved her better now than he had ever done before. There was a chivalrous devotion in his manner towards her, a wistful sort of dependence upon her help too, an infinite tenderness in his voice when he spoke to her, that could bear only one interpretation.

He had been at home more than a week before he told her all that was in his heart. She was sitting working at the window of the morning-room, one evening, when he came into the room, and going up to her, asked her gently, almost timidly, if she would go into the garden with him. She rose at once, scarcely knowing what she did, but with the sort of feeling of the inevitable that people have in dreams. And in the same dream fashion she saw the garden as they went slowly up the broad turf walk, on each side of which pink, and red, and white roses were blowing, and letting their leaves fall in gentle showers on the grass beneath. And then she saw that he was leading her to the bower where they had sat together on that last day before he left her, months ago. It was very fragrant now, with Ayrshire roses and honeysuckle, and the white blossoms of the 'Traveller's Joy' tangled all over it. As they sat down, side by side, a keen memory of that past time, with all its joy and grief, came back upon her,—of all

she had lived through since then, too; it all passed before her in a minute, in one of those flashes of thought, such as people have when they are drowning. His thoughts must have travelled back much as hers did; for when he spoke, his first words were, 'Do you remember the last time we sat here, Miss Lester?'

She was silent, and he went on, his voice low and tremulous. 'When you sent me away then, I confess that I was very hopeless. The barrier that you raised between us seemed to me very impassable. I had no hope of ever being worthy to come back to you. I am not worthy now, I feel that more keenly even than I did then; but God has been better to me than I deserved, and a great change has come over me,—a change not of my seeking, but of his free sending.'

And then he told her, as well as he could—for his voice would break sometimes, and silences fell here and there that told more than words—all the story of George Desmond. Of his beautiful life, and beautiful death; of their close and tender friendship, and the influence which, on looking back, he saw had grown steadily from the beginning; of that day of agony, when 'the pains of hell took hold of him,' though of that he could speak little; of his wonderful dream, and of the waking to light and peace.

'My whole life is changed,' he said. 'Before, I went drifting about, like a boat without a rudder or compass, without any plan or purpose, only caring to do what was pleasantest at the time. Now, I have a definite plan before me. I don't know whether God has much happiness before me in this world, or whether He means my life to be a full or an empty one. But I know now that a man's life-work does not depend upon happiness; and whether he gives me what is the desire of my heart, or no, from henceforth I will serve Him.'

He was silent for a minute. The wind moved through the branches above them, and a fragrant shower of rose-petals floated down to their feet.

'And now,' he went on, 'can you trust me for the future? I know,' and he bent his head humbly, 'I know I have done nothing yet. I am but a Fainéant still, though I mean to be something different, God willing. But can you take that upon trust, Mercy? Will you believe that I will try hard to be your true knight at last, fighting against the sin and misery and wrong there is in the world? Can you trust me, Mercy?'

He looked eagerly into her face, and then the proud, reticent woman's nature gave way, and with a thoroughly womanly gesture she laid her hand on his empty sleeve, and putting down her face on it, burst into a passion of tears.

'Hush, my darling,' he whispered. 'There is nothing to cry for in that.'

'You have suffered so,' she sobbed; 'and you are so humble; and I—I was so proud then, I spoke so hardly to you.'

'Dear, you spoke the noblest, truest words that were ever spoken to me,' he answered, putting his lips to her bright hair. 'They were the first words that fairly broke through the crust of idleness and selfishness that had grown over me. They stirred the sleeping soul within me like the notes of a trumpet.'

'And now,' he said, half an hour afterwards, when Mercy was calm and radiant, 'don't you want to know what our future life is to be like?'

'Very much,' she answered, smiling.

'Whenever I began seriously to think about it, and I thought a good deal during my slow convalesence, I saw that the duty of every man to whom God has given property in trust, is to live, for the most of his time, on his own land, among his own people.'

'Ah, I am glad you have found out that,' said Mercy.

'You think so too, then, darling? And you will not mind the place itself not being very pleasant?'

'You know we are agreed that pleasantness has nothing to do with such matters,' she said, with a

smile that was certainly a pleasant thing to him. 'And that relation, the one between landlord and tenant, is, I think, a very sacred one, not to be lightly broken.'

'I am ashamed when I think of those poor people at Eagleshill. I, who have lived in idleness on what was won by the sweat of their brows, do not know one of them by sight. I've taken as little care for either their souls or bodies, as if they had been draught horses. Less than that.'

'We'll mend that now,' she said gently.

'Yes, with God's help we will. And—I know so little, Mercy. You will help me, will you not? You, with your clear, pure vision, will see what is right to be done, and keep me from blundering? You will be my right hand always?'

'I will try,' she answered.

'Ah, the pleasantness will not be far off, when you are near me,' he said tenderly. 'My own beautiful love.'

'Tell me about Eagleshill. Where is it? Do you remember what it is like?'

'It is in the south of Scotland, near the border, and the value of the place depends upon coal mines. I fear they will be a rough set to bring you among, those colliers.'

'We'll try to smooth them,' she said brightly.

'The place itself is not bad, I think, but a good

deal out of repair. There is the pleasure, too, in having the making of a place, is there not, darling?'

'Yes,' she answered frankly. 'Christian, don't you think that when we don't make pleasantness our chief end, God sends us a great deal more of it? Ah, He is very good to us. When we travel along the road which He sets before us, we find such lovely flowers by the wayside, and such pleasant fruits for us to gather as we go along.'

'I am fully experiencing that just now,' he answered, looking fondly into her shining eyes. 'Few men have such flowers as you are, given to them. Oh, my love, what a wise, faithful, loving counsellor you are!'

'Hush,' she said, hiding her face. 'You think too well of me. I'm only a foolish, ignorant woman. I know that you will guide me more than ever I can help you, Christian. And I'll be so glad. I want you to be strongest.'

'We'll help each other, darling. And God is over us both.'

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### CONCLUSION.

AND so both of the women, a part of whose life-stories I have tried to tell, were brought to do just the kind of work that was most suited to them. If you have formed to yourself a definite conception of Mercy's character, as I have attempted to represent it to you, you will have little difficulty in imagining the outlines of her future life. She became, as it was natural she should, a calm and kind house-mother, the light of her happy home, a right hand to her husband, a type of all that was fair and gracious in womanhood, to him and to her children, a centre from which good radiated upon all about her. When Christian took her to Eagleshill they found plenty of work ready for them, work that was often hard, and not always pleasant.

They found a set of people who were just what colliers are likely to become, when no softening,

civilising influences have been brought to bear upon them, and their souls and bodies have been alike uncared for. Mr. Osborne found that he had to reap the fruit of years of neglect in the indifference of his people towards him, and in the difficulty of acquiring the influence he desired to gain over them. He had to struggle against his own habits of half a life-time, for a man does not all at once become a new being after conversion, but has to fight many a battle with his old nature. He had to struggle, too, against the deep-rooted prejudices, the gross sottishness and immorality of those with whom he had to deal; with their distrust of himself and his motives, their half childish, half brutal stupidity, their intense dislike of innovation in any form. It took years before he began to get fairly over all this, and to feel that he had won a hold on the affection of the people. And during those years he had resolutely to put aside the old, indolent love of pleasantness, and the shrinking from pain of all sorts. Yet, as Mercy had said, though happiness had ceased to be his aim in life, and he had set his face towards blessedness instead, he found many a sweet flower springing by the wayside, many a pleasant fruit growing in his life-garden. And he was never more truly happy than after he had ceased to regard happiness as the chief thing to be lived for.

Mercy's help was invaluable to him during the

first years of their residence at Eagleshill. She was accustomed to make friends among the poor, and to the working out of plans for raising them from the depths into which they are so apt to sink; she knew where and when a helping hand was needed, and how it might best be stretched out; she had, in fact, already gone through the training necessary to any efficient worker among the poor, which Christian had still to begin. And as years went on, and Eagleshill House became full of children, and she had necessarily to withdraw from active co-operation in many of his schemes, and to devote herself to the training of the souls that God had more specially put under her care, she still remained to him a wise and prudent counsellor, always ready to encourage him when he was weary, and to give him tender love and unfailing sympathy.

Ailie's life was an altogether different one. For some years after her marriage she was very silent as to those utterances which were to be her life-work. She accompanied her husband in most of his long voyages, and her nature drank in all that was most beautiful in what she saw. The glory of sea and sky, the solemnity of the wide ocean, with its over-arching dome of blue, the gorgeous tropical scenery, all the parts of the great panorama that passed before her were silently, almost unconsciously, absorbed.

And then, to make her more fit for the work she had to do, her heart and soul were purified both by great joy and great sorrow. Two fragile little creatures were born in the old Red House, and two tiny graves were dug in the old churchyard, where her mother lay. And when her own health, never very robust, gave way, and the doctors said that the free breezes of the open sea were life for her, she would lie on her mattress on deck, her brown eyes more wistful than ever with the longing, aching emptiness of bereaved motherhood.

It was a hard thing for Robbie to see her so. He, so full of life and strength, could yet do so little for the frail thing that he loved with such tenderness; he felt his own exuberant health to be almost a burden to him sometimes as he looked at her, and felt how vain his wish was that some of his strength could be transmitted to her by some process of transfusion. And in his tender care of her, a care that was more than womanly in its patience, he made her know that his nature, so strong and gentle, was the one best suited to her in all the world.

'Am I not better to thee than ten sons?' he would whisper sometimes, when, as he paced the deck, he encountered the wide wistful look in her eyes.

And her heart always answered that he was better to her than all the world besides.

At last the joy came. Another child was born in the Red House, a grand boy, who inherited his father's strength of constitution as well as his steady blue eyes. And then Ailie was content.

It was some time after the birth of her son that Ailie's tongue was fairly loosed, and she began to speak so that all the world could hear.

Little poems began to come out here and there, which, those who could understand such things took hold of at once, and made their own. And then came a little volume, and the world knew that a true poet had risen.

Her words sunk into sorrowful hearts and comforted them, and became the jewels that were treasured by many a lonely life. And as she had once said to Mercy, in her girlhood, her face was always resolutely turned away from evil, and towards good. Whatever influence her words had, was in favour of what was true, and pure, and noble. And so she, too, according to the power He had given her, served God.

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